

Religious Competition and the Decoration of Sanctuaries The case of Dura-Europos

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In memory of Han J.W. Drijvers

The ruins of the ancient city of Dura-Europos are situated on the left bank of the Euphrates in present-day Syria, close to the Iraqi border. Founded by the Greeks around 300 BC, the small city was ruled by the Parthians from about 116 BC to 165 CE¹. In that year, the Romans conquered the city and turned it into a frontier post of their empire, which it remained until the Sassanian army finally conquered it in 256 CE². After this it was soon deserted and never inhabited again, until it was rediscovered and excavated in the nineteen-twenties and -thirties of the last century³. Since 1986, a joint French-Syrian mission has resumed the exploration of Dura-Europos. About a quarter of the ancient city has been excavated thus far, and the results are extremely impressive from an archaeological, art historical and religious point of view. The impact is all the greater because the remains allow for an overall view of the city; the combination of architecture, wall paintings, sculpture, inscriptions, papyri and small finds provides a truly exceptional insight in daily life.

In an attempt to counter Sassanian siege, the Roman defenders of Dura reinforced the great western defensive wall by filling with rubble first the street behind the wall and then part of the building of the adjoining block. This accounts for the spectacular finds of vulnerable materials such as wall paintings and papyri in and alongside 'wall street'. Most famous among art historians and historians of religion are the paintings from the synagogue and the baptistery of the small Christian building⁴. Less well known, but equally spectacular, are the paintings from the Mithraeum⁵. All three buildings were decorated with frescoes in the forties of the third century. Dated to the second half of the first century are the frescoes from a pagan temple situated in the northwestern corner of the city that the excavators called the temple of the Palmyrene gods or the temple of Bel. In addition to these well-preserved buildings with their wall paintings along

'wall street', within the city proper, archaeologists discovered numerous cult buildings dedicated to a multitude of deities. Since they are less well preserved and insufficiently published on, these monuments are far less well known.

The excavations in Dura thus far have yielded at least fifteen cult buildings, in which the local population worshipped an even greater number of deities (Fig. 1)⁶. On the basis of names attested in inscriptions and representations on paintings or reliefs, we can discern gods of Greek, Babylonian, Aramaic, Phoenician, Arab, Iranian and Roman origin. Of the buildings, the Christian and Jewish

¹ On Parthian Dura, see Millar 1998, and Dirven 1999, 4-11.

² On Roman Dura, see Millar 1993, 445-454, 467-472. On the date of the fall of Dura Europos, see James 1985.

³ For an extensive description of its discovery and the history of the excavations between the two World Wars: Hopkins 1979.

⁴ The two buildings with their decoration were each the subject of a final report: Kraeling 1956 and Kraeling 1967. The literature on both monuments is vast. For an overview, see recent discussions such as Weitzmann and Kessler 1990, Wharton 1995, 15-63, Hachlili 1998, esp. 96-197, and Elsner, 2001.

⁵ Rostovtzeff 1934, 180-207; TEAD VII-VIII, 104-116 (Cumont and Rostovtzeff); Cumont 1975 is part of the planned final report, which was never published in full.

⁶ For an indispensable discussion of the architecture of these shrines and references to previous publications, see Downey 1988, 76-124. It ought to be stressed that the names that are conventionally used for these shrines should not be taken literally, and do not necessarily refer to the tutelary deity of the temple. The following comments apply to the list of sacred buildings given with Fig. 1. Rostovtzeff interprets the small building to the northeast of the main gate (L8) as a Tychaeum (TEAD III, 37-39), whereas Pillet interprets it as a custom house (TEAD III, 13). In addition, mention should be made of the recent discovery of a Palmyrene votive relief in a room of a building in block M5. Many aspects of this room are still unclear, but it may very well have served a religious function: Leriche 1997, 81-94. For the relief see Bounni 1994 and Dirven 1999, 273-278 with Pl. X, a cast of the original relief.

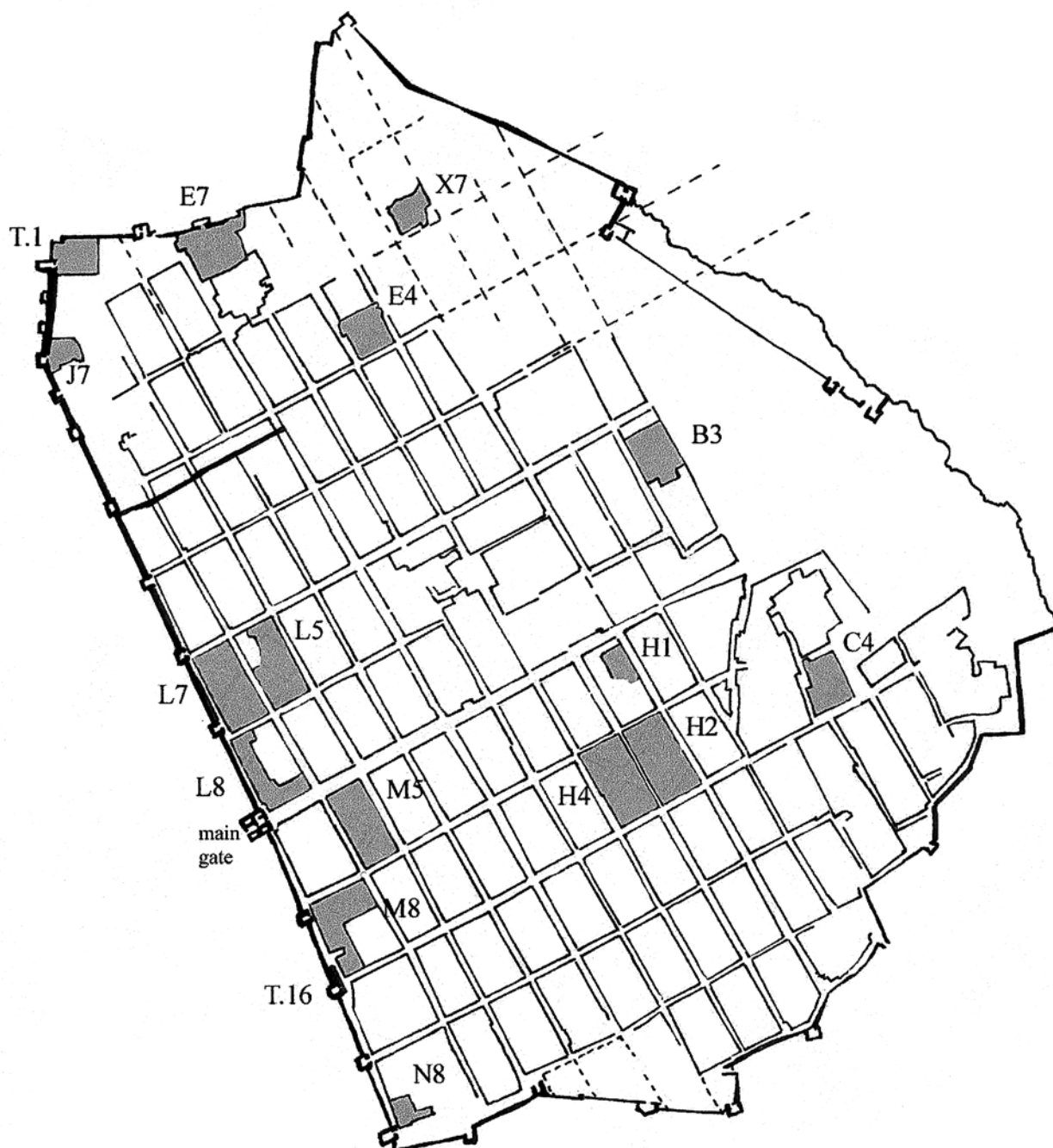


Fig. 1. City plan of Dura-Europos with cult buildings: B3-Temple of Zeus Theos; C4-Temple of Zeus Megistos; E7-Temple of Azzanathkona; H1-Temple of the Gadde; H2-Temple of Atargatis; H4-Temple of Artemis; L5-Temple of Adonis; L7-Synagogue; L8-Tycheum (?); M5-Building of the Palmyrene relief; M8-Christian building; N8-Temple of Aphlad; T1-Temple of the Palmyrene gods; T16-Temple of Zeus Kyrios; X7-Dolichineum; The Necropolis temple, situated on the plateau about 150 metres north-west of the main gate, falls outside the map.

cult centres have received by far the most attention. A fifteen-page article by C. B. Wells published in 1969 is still the most complete overview of the other cults in the city. This neglect of the pagan cults prompted me to devote a study to the religion of people from Palmyra who lived in Dura⁷. Nevertheless, the amount of work that still needs to be done on pagan cults in Dura is considerable.

Notwithstanding the lack of a firm basis of research into religious life at Dura, scholars have readily come up with an assessment of the religious situation in the city. Dura-Europos was not a very big city and the various cult buildings are situated very close to each other. In view of this proximity, scholars generally assume that the various cults influenced each other. According to some, this presumed process of religious interaction is characterised by assimilation or acculturation, whereas others stress the differentiation between different religious groups⁸. There is a widespread view that the religious pluralism in Dura-Europos resulted in a competitive situation. Scholars differ in their assessment of which cults were involved in this competition. According to some, all cults competed against each other, whereas others restrict competition to the adherents of Judaism and Christianity, with their pagan neighbours⁹. A third group of scholars confine the rivalry to Christian and Jewish adherents¹⁰. The subject is even more complicated by the variety of uses of the word “competition”. Strictly speaking, competition means rivalry in striving for the same goal. In case of religious competition, this goal can be specified in a theoretical and in a practical way. On a theoretical level we speak of competition if a religious group thinks that its belief system surpasses the messages of other religious group. On a practical level, this may imply that the members of a given religious group request recognition from the adherents of other cults and encourage them to be incorporated into the group. There are instances where the rejection of past modes of religious behaviour is demanded, but this is not necessarily the case. In practice then, competition means that different religious groups are fighting over potential members.

Local literary sources commenting upon the relationship between the various cults at Dura are lacking, and the presumed competition between religious groups is thus based on the interpretation of archaeological remains. Besides the architecture, the interpretation of cult icons is crucial. The

starting point is the idea that religious art is more than mere decoration or illustration, and plays a crucial role in establishing the religious self-definition of the group. It is assumed that images may affirm religious identity along two lines. First, they may explicitly reject other cults. Second, religious images may affirm a cultic identity by using factors that are structurally different from those used in the arts of other religions. It is thought that this kind of self-affirmation implies a rejection of other cults.

The aim of this article is to challenge the assumption that most religions in Dura-Europos were competitive, by showing that the decoration of most sanctuaries does not unambiguously testify to rivalry. This is not to say that religious imagery does not play a decisive role in establishing the religious identity of a group. I hope to show that it does. However, religious self-definition does not necessarily imply differentiation from others. It does not follow from religious pluralism that different groups are at odds with each other. In fact, it is not the pluriform situation but the character of a particular religion that accounts for competition. Competition implies that individuals can choose between various cults and that this choice has far-reaching implications for their social and religious identity. Although to the modern ear this may sound like a feature inherent in all religions, this element of choice was only introduced in the Hellenistic period and reached its peak with the rise of the great monotheistic proselytizing religions: Christianity, Manichaeism and Islam¹¹. Before this

⁷ Dirven 1999.

⁸ See Dirven 1999, XIX-XXII, for a discussion of these notions.

⁹ Such is suggested by Bickerman 1965, 145; Grabar 1969, 27-29; Kraabel 1981, 83; Matthews 1993, 3-20; Elsner 1998, 212-218. The latter author advocates a more nuanced view in his 2001 publication, where Jewish, Christian and Mithraic cults are distinguished from the other cults in the city. Competition between Jews, Christians and their pagan environment: Kraeling, 1967, 158: ‘.. and indeed the appearance of Jewish and Christian representations is not to be completely understood without consideration of the competitive situation in which the two communities found themselves.’

¹⁰ Simon 1962; Weitzmann/Kessler 1990, 178-183

¹¹ North 1992. Although I agree with North that the element of choice was introduced from the Hellenistic period onwards, I doubt that competition between these cults was strong before the rise of Christianity and other messianic Jewish sects. In this respect I follow Goodman 1994, although I find his definition of a proselytizing religion too narrow.

element of choice was introduced, religious rituals and practices were integral to all civic, local or family activities. Differentiated religious institutions or identifiable religious groups based on popular membership simply did not exist. As a matter of course, people were loyal to the gods of the city, the tribe and the family. Of course, it did happen that one city tried to outdo other cities by the splendour of its sanctuaries. This, however, was first and foremost a socio-political matter. It did not mean that this city thought its gods were more powerful than the gods from other localities, let alone that it was of the opinion that other peoples should reject their own gods and turn to its deities instead¹².

In what follows, I intend to show that before the advent of the Roman army in 165 CE, religion in Dura-Europos was still very much embedded in the city and the family. The idea of a religious market place, appropriate though it may be for some places in the Roman Empire, does not apply to the Parthian city. It was only in Roman Dura that the element of choice was introduced, as a consequence of which religion became more differentiated. Even then, however, Dura was far from being the competitive arena that it is frequently imagined to be. As Martin Goodman rightly points out in his thought-provoking study of mission and conversion in the Roman Empire, the idea of different ancient religions competing over adherents may be labelled an unconscious Christianization of antique cults¹³. In order to challenge the view of competing religions at Dura, I shall first evaluate the arguments from the archaeological material that have frequently been put forward to substantiate this hypothesis. As will become apparent, the idea of competitive religions at Dura is based exclusively upon the Jewish and Christian material. These cults are not, however, representative of the entire religious situation. Furthermore, the interpretation of the Jewish and Christian material tends to take too little notice of the archaeological context. Instead, images are explained by means of merely a

few texts which derive, moreover, from other localities and other times. These interpretations all set out from the assumption that competition between various cults was inevitable. Subsequently, I shall evaluate the religious imagery from various lesser known cults at Dura in search of religious competition. By taking into account the archaeological context of these images, we may attain an insight into the social and religious position of the onlookers, which provides the key to a more accurate understanding of the religious imagery.

PREVIOUS ARGUMENTS FOR RELIGIOUS COMPETITION: AN ASSESSMENT

Arguments on the basis of archaeology that have been brought forward to substantiate the idea of competing cults can be divided in arguments from architecture and arguments from iconography. The inconspicuous architecture of both the Christian building and the synagogue has been cited by some as proof of the subordinate position of both groups¹⁴. Both the Christian building and the synagogue are effectively introverted: the main rooms are grouped around a central court, the wall alongside the street is windowless, and an anteroom or corridor precludes the gaze of passers by. The private and inconspicuous character of the Christian and Jewish architecture is connected to a presumed precarious position of both cults within a predominantly pagan environment. By the mid-third century, when the house in block M8 was remodelled for ritual purposes by the Christians, Romans thought of Christianity as a *superstitio*¹⁵. Although the Roman authorities permitted the Jewish cult, it is argued that anti-Jewish sentiment could easily come to the surface in a predominantly gentile environment. However, the architecture of the Christian building and the synagogue cannot be cited as proof for a subordinate position of these two cults, since interiority is also characteristic of other cult buildings at Dura. With few exceptions, the temples in Dura follow a courtyard plan of Mesopotamian type and are not visible from the street¹⁶. The private character of the Christian building and synagogue is therefore consistent with the architectural practice of the greater community of which these cults are part, and has nothing to do with local animosity towards them¹⁷.

The successive ever-grander rebuilding, with increasingly complex iconographic schemes, are also

¹² Goodman 1994, 17.

¹³ Goodman 1994, 3.

¹⁴ Krautheimer 1986, 28. Already denied by Kraeling 1969, 110.

¹⁵ Wilken 1984, 66.

¹⁶ Downey 1988, 89 ff.

¹⁷ Wharton 1995, 26-32.

cited as proof of the competition between various cults¹⁸. The archaeological evidence indeed points to several important bursts of temple building at Dura. However, in all instances circumstantial evidence allows for a more plausible explanation than religious competition. The first building session occurred in the first century CE¹⁹. It can be satisfactorily explained by the arrival of new people and an increase in prosperity²⁰. The earthquake of 160 CE accounts for the rebuilding of sanctuaries during the second half of the second century²¹. Another period of intensive rebuilding took place shortly after 209-216 CE. At this time the northern half of the city was confiscated by the Roman army and was turned into a military camp. This not only led to major alterations in the northern quarter itself, but also caused many changes in the remainder of the city, since residents from the northern quarter were forced to settle here. The fact that the synagogue, the Christian cult building and the Mithraeum were all enlarged and redecorated around 240 CE is indeed a remarkable coincidence and testifies to an increased popularity of the three cults. However, it is by no means necessary to assume that they grew at the expense of other cults in the city. Both the Mithraic and the Christian community largely consisted of Roman soldiers. Since the forties of the third century are marked by intensified military activity, the rebuilding of both cult buildings may simply reflect the growing number of soldiers in the city.

The main arguments advanced to prove the existence of religious competition derive from the painted decoration of sanctuaries. In the scholarly debate, a distinction has been made between representations that are supposed to reject other cults explicitly, and representations that do so in a less explicit way by affirming the identity of one's own group in reaction to others. Both arguments are based primarily upon the paintings from the synagogue. The explicit images are directed towards the pagan environment, whereas the implicit imagery is thought by some to be an internal reaction against Christian claims.

On the basis of a text painted on one of the tiles of the ceiling, the paintings from the synagogue can be dated to 244-245 CE²². The assembly hall is one of the largest single rooms of which we have knowledge in Dura, measuring 13.65 x 7.68 m on the interior. The walls were entirely decorated with

fresco panels of different lengths arranged in three registers above a painted dado (Pl. 1). Thanks to its location adjacent to 'wall street', about 60 % of the original decoration has been preserved; twenty-eight panels that picture about fifty-eight events described in Jewish holy books. Ever since the discovery of these frescoes in 1932, there has been an ongoing debate about whether or not we are dealing with a programme, and whether the paintings are the product of mystic symbolism or follow rabbinic Judaism²³. It is questionable whether a consensus will ever be reached. At the basis of the disagreement lies our ignorance about the type of Judaism practised in Dura-Europos. In the past few decades, historical research has revealed a great diversity in Judaism during the first centuries of the Common Era. What is known about this multitude of movements is merely a tip of the iceberg, and is determined to a large extent by the winning party, rabbinic Judaism²⁴.

Like most of the scenes from the synagogue, the three panels that are thought by some to represent the rejection of contemporary pagan cult practices illustrate historical events described in Jewish sacred texts²⁵. In the second register of the west wall, one finds a panel depicting the Ark of the Covenant in the Philistine temple of Dagon and its subsequent return to the Israelites on a cart drawn by cattle (I Sam. 6:1-12, conflated with 2 Sam. 6:1-19; Pl. 2)²⁶. On the right-hand side, we see the facade of the empty temple of Dagon, with cult statues and implements scattered in the foreground. Of

¹⁸ Elsner 1998, 216.

¹⁹ TEAD VII-VIII, 195 (Brown); Rostovtzeff 1935, 197 ff.

²⁰ Dirven 1999, 6-7, with references for further reading.

²¹ The earthquake, which occurred at 10 am on 26th October of the year 160 CE, is commemorated on an altar dedicated to Zeus Megistos from the so-called temple of the Palmyrene gods or temple of Bel: TEAD II, 86-89, no. H2.

²² Kraeling 1956, 263-266.

²³ No programme: Rostovtzeff 1938, 109. The major advocate of a literal interpretation is Kraeling 1956. A Messianistic reading of the frescoes was proposed by Goodenough and is followed in the main lines by Neusner 1964-65 and 1987. For a review of the different positions, see Gutmann 1973 and Wharton 1995, 38-51. For a list of the different texts that have been attributed to the individual panels, see Gutmann 1984.

²⁴ Ter Haar Romeny, forthcoming, for further references.

²⁵ The interpretations discussed here were proposed a long time ago. The strong emphasis on anti-pagan imagery was recently renewed by Elsner 2001, 281-299.

²⁶ Kraeling 1956, 99-105, Pl. LVI.



Pl. 1. General view of the west and north wall of the synagogue, on display in the National Museum of Damascus (photo L. Dirven)

note in the present discussion are the two statues that are represented wearing Parthian dress. Comte Robert Mesnil du Buisson was the first to point out that they look almost exactly like the divine figure on a painting from the so-called temple of Adonis a few blocks away from the synagogue²⁷. This interpretation has found almost unanimous approval²⁸. Recently, Warren Moon has suggested that the poses of the broken statues with their arms raised resemble those of imperial images that were probably the object of a cult in the Praetorium or elsewhere in the military camp²⁹. Two panels on the south wall depicting the story of the combat between the

prophet Elijah and the priests of Baal (I Kings 18:26, 30-38) are also interpreted by some as an aggressive commentary on local pagan religions³⁰. According to Jas Elsner, the defeat of the prophets of Baal must for Jewish onlookers call to mind the sacrificial activities at the temple of Bel³¹.

There can be no doubt that these scenes illustrate the superiority of Judaism over other religions. In fact, the superiority of the Jewish god over other deities is a recurrent theme in the historical tradition of the Jewish people. It is questionable, however, whether the Jewish community of Dura interpreted these panels as a reference to their contemporary situation. Although the stress put on these paintings in secondary literature might suggest otherwise, the struggle against idolatry is not a subject that dominates the paintings. All in all, only three out of the twenty-eight panels centre on this theme. Furthermore, although the similarities between Dagon's fallen statue and the cult icon from the temple of Adonis seem striking at first, the differences are equally significant. The divine image in the temple of Adonis at Dura was a painting, not

²⁷ Mesnil du Buisson 1939, 77.

²⁸ For instance Kraabel 1981, 83; Goodenough 1988, 224... (the painter) used the incident from I Samuel to show the collapse of paganism before the reality of Judaism, the collapse of paganism presumably as he knew it directly in Dura itself... Weitzmann and Kessler 1990, 76. Elsner 2001, 282 is more cautious.

²⁹ Moon 1995, 299.

³⁰ Kraeling 1956, 137-143, Pl. LXII.

³¹ Elsner 2001, 299.



Pl. 2. Ark of the Covenant in the land of the Philistines. Panel in the second register of the west wall of the synagogue (photo L. Dirven)

a statue³². In fact, as far as one can tell from the available evidence, the indigenous cults at Dura all used paintings or reliefs to represent deities, not statues³³. All the figures on the frescoes are represented wearing contemporary dress. Hence it is questionable whether much significance should be attached to the outfit of Dagon's statues. In this respect, the statue of Dagon deviates from the usual iconography of Roman emperors, meaning that a hidden reference to the imperial cult is unlikely. Significantly, the facade of Dagon's temple bears no relation whatsoever to local religious architecture at Dura. Instead, it was probably inspired by representations on foreign coins. This also holds true for the outfits of the priests of Baal, that have nothing in common with the outfits of Durene priests as we know them³⁴. There is no reason why the sacrifice to Baal would have reminded the Jews at Dura of the god Bel. Although both names mean 'Lord', the gods were lords of different localities and must have seemed to the ancient observer completely unrelated.

The evidence that the three panels are intended as a criticism of the pagan neighbours of the Jewish community at Dura is not conclusive. The three panels discussed above are in fact the only possible indication in this direction. Instead, what we see in Dura is a thriving Jewish community, culturally well integrated into their environment³⁵. As far as we can

³² TEAD VII-VIII, 138. Note the extremely fragmentary character of this painting.

³³ Drijvers 1990, 71. It should be added, though, that this changed in the period of Roman domination. From this period dates the small freestanding aedicule that housed the cult image in the naos from the temple of the Palmyrene gods, whereas graffiti from the same room mention jewellery of the gods: Downey 1988, 107.

³⁴ The best-known representations of priests from Dura are to be found on the so-called sacrifice of Konon from the temple of the Palmyrene gods or temple of Bel. Cf. below, 10-11. The relief representing the Gad of Dura (Pl. 4) represents a priest, who wears the priestly modius typical of priests from Palmyra.

³⁵ Compare the remarks by J. Neusner with respect to the position of the Jewish community in Parthian and Sasanian

tell, there was no such thing at Dura as a Jewish neighbourhood. The Jews from Dura literally lived among the other inhabitants of the city and spoke the same language. Their paintings were made by a local workshop that was also hired to decorate other cult buildings at Dura. In these paintings, use is made of a great many pagan motifs and symbols. Whether this cultural assimilation implies religious assimilation as well is, of course, questionable. Possibly, pagan motifs were reinterpreted in the context of the Jewish religion³⁶. However, some iconographic devices strongly suggest the Jews of Dura shared more beliefs with their fellow townsmen than is generally assumed. Two synagogue tiles depict the apotropaic eye, a device that was common in pagan Dura and the remainder of Roman Syria³⁷. Clearly, there was nothing mutually exclusive about being Jewish on the one hand and part of society on the other.

In view of the lack of circumstantial evidence, the interpretation of the three panels can be said to rest primarily upon the assumption that the Jewish community at Dura was a minority group waging a continuous battle against idolatry and polytheism³⁸. In this respect, the Jews of Dura are exemplary of what many scholars assume a Diaspora community to be: a group whose members experience their immigrant status as undesirable³⁹. These

Jewish groups are supposed to have felt homeless and uprooted. Their environment, which was fundamentally hostile to the Jewish way of life, would have attracted them on the one hand, because of the social and economic advantages assimilation seemed to offer; and repelled them on the other, because of the threat assimilation would constitute to their proper, traditional, identity. In his study of the notion "Diaspora" in the Hellenistic period, Johannes Tromp convincingly points out that this view is misleading and does not tally with what is known about the situation of various Jewish Diaspora communities⁴⁰. Tromp shows that, in most cases, non-Jews did not object to the Jewish way of life. Hence there was no reason for people who were born Jewish to forswear or defend their Jewish identity. This could change as a result of specific local circumstances. However, we have no reason to assume this was the case at Dura.

The paintings from the synagogue have also been interpreted as an internal affirmation of the Jewish identity in reaction to other cults, in particular to Christianity. Hence it has been assumed that the narrative character of the Jewish frescoes is a response to Christian claims to the Old Testament. The first to suggest that the paintings reflect a pre-occupation with Christianity analogous to that found in rabbinical exegesis was Marcel Simon⁴¹. His hypothesis recently found a defender in Martin Kessler⁴². They argue that many of the events represented in the synagogue are among those that were frequently used in Jewish-Christian polemics in the late second and third century, for example by Justin Martyr and Origen. Against the typological interpretation proposed by the Christians, the Jews, in their illustrations of these texts, stressed the literal sense.

Against this hypothesis, one first has to stress that there is no way of knowing whether the panels from the synagogue are indeed literal illustrations of specific Jewish texts. The symbolic interpretation that was proposed by Joseph Goodenough shows that an allegorical reading of the paintings is equally possible. The interpretation of the paintings depends on the type of Judaism one supposes to have been present at Dura. As stated above, this is unknown. Second, the Jewish and Christian material from Dura testifies to little interaction. The decoration of the Christian baptistery does indeed testify to the adaptation and assimilation of Jewish

Babylonia in the foreword to Goodenough 1988, xxviii ff. However, Neusner and Goodenough's idea that the era is characterised by a great religious diversity and creativity that provoked a deep reflection on religious tradition does not, in my view, apply to Dura, and cannot be the inspiration for the interpretation of the synagogue frescoes.

³⁶ Contra Goodenough. On the distinction between cultural and religious interaction, see Dirven 1999, XXI.

³⁷ Kraeling 1956, 48-49, Figs 11-12. For instances from Dura, see Cumont 1926, 137-139, Fig. 31 and TEAD VI, 15 ff, Pl. XLIII.3. The occurrence of the evil eye in the synagogue amply illustrates that a common religious ground between different religious groups is likely to be found in 'magical' beliefs: Drijvers 1992, 128.

³⁸ Kraeling 1956, 105.

³⁹ According to many scholars, one of the themes of the painting is 'the messianic hope for the restoration of Israel, through the ingathering of the peoples and the rebuilding of Jerusalem': Weitzmann and Kessler 1995, 178.

⁴⁰ Tromp 1998. Also Kraabel 1981, 85, who remarks that by the first century CE, Diaspora Jews had spiritualized the Temple and Jerusalem. Like Tromp, he notes this is a concomitant of their sense of being at home in the Diaspora.

⁴¹ Simon 1962.

⁴² Weitzmann and Kessler 1995, 178-183.

traditions in a Christian context⁴³. However, it is by no means clear that the Jewish community considered this a threat. As was rightly noted by Kraeling, the Jewish and Christian congregations in Dura appear to have been quite separate⁴⁴. It may be inferred from the contemporary enlargement of both cult buildings that both communities thrived at the same time. The inscriptions from the two buildings confirm that the cults did not grow at the expense of one another. The personal names from the synagogue are all potentially Jewish, whereas the names from the Christian building are Greek or Syriac and not necessarily Jewish. Some appear to be local names, but most are known only from the military records. This suggests that the growth of the Christian community was largely due to the Roman garrison. This is especially surprising in view of what is known about the relationship between both cults elsewhere in Syria. Jewish traditions in the later literature of the Syriac Church suggest that Christianity in North Mesopotamia originated at least partly in Judaism and that there were intimate contacts between Christian and Jewish groups⁴⁵. We shall return to the relationship between these two cults in our discussion of the baptistery.

We may conclude that the evidence for the presumed religious competition in Dura is very slight, to say the least. First, this view is to a large extent determined by the preponderance given to the Jewish frescoes. In spite of their magnificence, however, these paintings are not representative of the fifteen cult buildings that have been found so far. Second, the interpretations that have so far been proposed for the Jewish material are largely based on a preconceived view of Jewish Diaspora communities. Does this imply that archaeological material is not a suitable basis on which to reconstruct the religious situation? Not necessarily. The visual arts are open to multiple meanings, and in order to establish the possible meanings, we have to reconstruct the social position and religious background of the onlookers. This is far from easy, as is amply illustrated by the great variety of interpretations that were proposed for the paintings in the synagogue and the Christian baptistery. These two cases are particularly illustrative, since they are the only representations that can be identified on the basis of particular texts. They make painfully clear that texts, like representations, have multiple meanings depending on their theological context. Unfor-

tunately, however, our main information as to the kind of Judaism or Christianity that flourished in Dura are the paintings themselves. In view of the deficiency of our sources, we would do better to admit ignorance and rephrase our questions. Instead of looking at distant texts, more attention should be paid to the contextual evidence.

A RE-EVALUATION OF DECORATIVE PROGRAMS

The following discussion sets out to re-evaluate the archaeological material of various cults at Dura in search of religious competition. The discussion is limited to sanctuaries in which representations were found. It should be stressed at the outset that the conclusions reached are preliminary, since most pagan cults have not yet been sufficiently studied.

The discussion is best started with the evidence from two temples that have a very similar scheme of decoration: the so-called temple of the Palmyrene gods in block J3-5 in the northwest corner of the city, and the temple of Zeus Theos in block B3, located in the city centre. The paintings from the naos of the temple of the Palmyrene gods should in all likelihood be dated shortly after the construction of the sanctuary, around 70 CE⁴⁶. The fragmentary paintings from the temple of Zeus Theos are slightly younger and probably date from the first years of the second century CE⁴⁷. The decorative scheme was as follows. At the back of the wall of the naos was the painted cult icon of the god, with the side walls divided into two or more zones on which were depicted figures sacrificing and attendant worshipping figures (Fig. 2)⁴⁸. Fragments of wall decora-

⁴³ Cf. the discussion of the Christian baptistery below, 16-17.

⁴⁴ Kraeling 1967, 107-109. Also Jensen 1999, 184.

⁴⁵ For an overview of the hypotheses on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, see Ter Haar Romeny, forthcoming.

⁴⁶ Cumont 1926, 57. A dedication to Zeus Soter dated 52 CE gives a *terminus ante quem* for the existence of a cult structure, though the temple could be somewhat older.

⁴⁷ Dura no. 886, dated to 114: TEAD VII-VIII, 196-210; Perkins 1973, 47-49, Pl. 14. Published were photo's of the heads of several women and the head of a priest, some of which are identified by Greek inscriptions.

⁴⁸ The cult icon at the back of the sanctuary of the temple of the Palmyrene gods and the temple of Zeus Theos is extremely fragmentary. A giant right foot with beside it in a much smaller scale, the lower parts of two attendants. Beside the leg of the deity, the hind leg of a horse and a

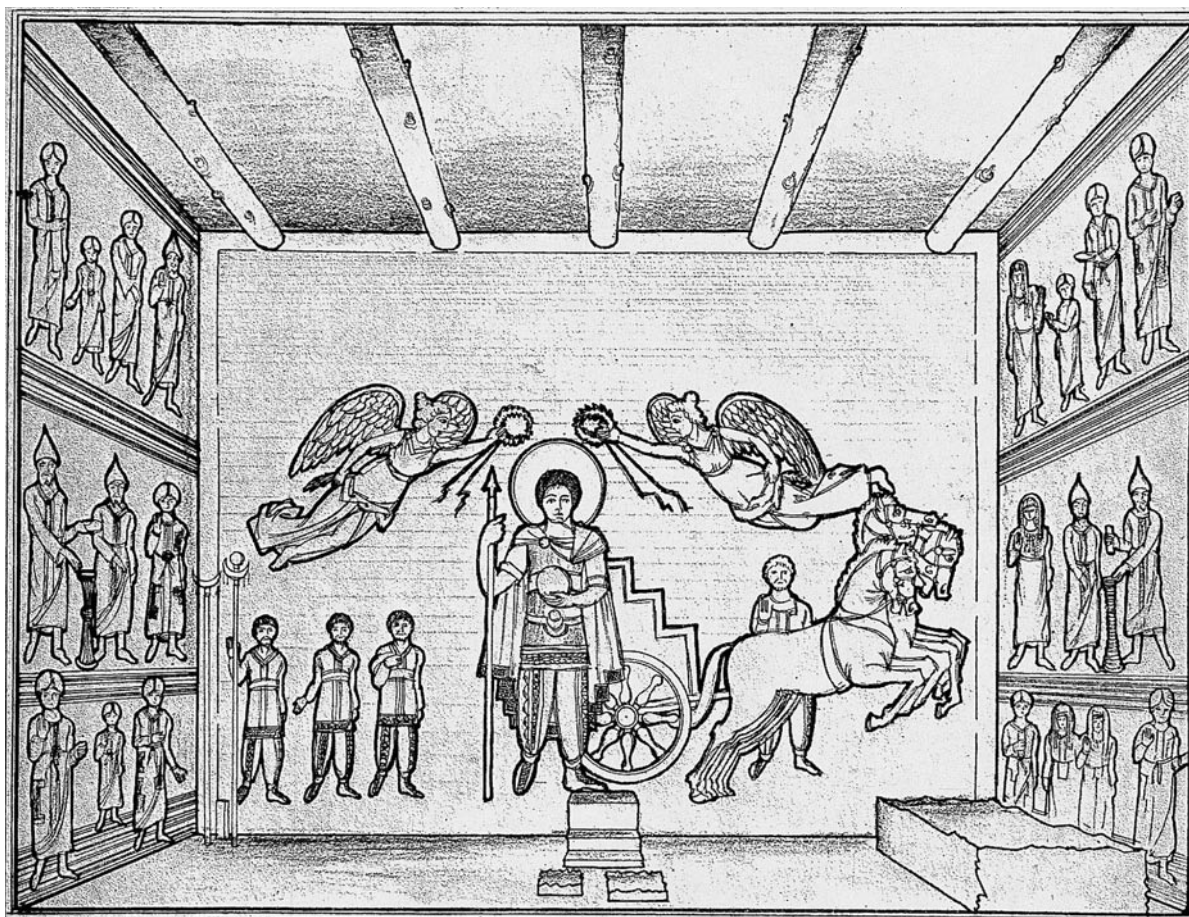


Fig. 2. Painted decoration of the naos of the temple of Zeus Theos as restored by F. Brown (YUAG, Dura-Europos collection)

tions found in other temples suggest that this type of composition was widespread at Dura⁴⁹.

The so-called fresco of the sacrifice of Konon that adorned the naos of the temple of the

small chariot wheel were still visible: Cumont 1926, 74-76, Pls XLII-XLIII. A fragmentary head of a Tyche and the heads of three horses are all that remains of the decoration of the back of the naos of the temple of Zeus Theos: TEAD VII-VIII. The reconstruction of the cult icon made by F. Brown (TEAD VII-VIII, 197) combines the finds from both temples and hence is highly conjectural.

⁴⁹ Rostovtzeff 1938, 75 assumes that the same scheme was used in the temple of Adonis, the temple of Aphlad, the temple of Atargatis, the earlier temple of the Gadde, and the Tycheum.

⁵⁰ See Breasted 1924, 54 ff, who gives a detailed description of the discovery of this painting that eventually led to the exploration of Dura. Wharton 1992, 35 rightly notes that the hand coloured photographs of the paintings published by Breasted distort the original painting. Her suggestion that

Palmyrene gods is illustrative of the decorative scheme that adorned the sidewalls of many sanctuaries at Dura. At the point of its accidental discovery in 1919 by the British army, the painting was in good condition. Unfortunately, Bedouin mutilated it shortly after it had been studied and photographed by James Henry Breasted in 1920⁵⁰. The painting that is now on display in the National Museum of Damascus is but a faint reflection of the original (Pl. 3). At the time of its discovery, the painting adorned the south wall of the naos and measured 4.25 x 3.80 m. It represented a row of eleven life-size figures in front of an architectural background. Above this band could be seen the feet of other figures, thus indicating that this sidewall was originally decorated with at least two bands of worshippers⁵¹. The three figures at the far left hand end of the painting are engaged in a ritual activity. Two are barefoot priests clad in long white robes



Pl. 3. Wall painting representing the sacrifice of Konon from the temple of the Palmyrene gods, now at display in the National Museum of Damascus (photo L. Dirven)

and tall conical headdresses. Both are offering on a portable altar. Behind them stands a third figure, who is identified by the accompanying Greek inscription as Konon. On the right hand side stand five adults in a row, and on a lower plane there are three children. All face full front, with their right hands raised in a gesture of prayer. The accompanying inscriptions identify these attendants as Konon's children and grandchildren. Breasted's copies still hint at the expressive, portrait-like character of the heads of these individuals, of which unfortunately nothing remains in the original⁵².

The Konon fresco represents various members of the same family in a communal act of worship in front of the deity that was represented at the back of the sanctuary. It may be inferred from inscriptional evidence that the people represented on the walls of the naos of the temple of Zeus Theos also belonged to two large Durene families⁵³. These paintings suggest that these temples were the place

of worship for particular families. This is confirmed by an inscription from the temple of the Palmyrene gods, dated to 115 CE, that states that the grandson of Konon, Lysias, the son of Konon, the son of Patroklos, dedicated a chapel with an upper story

the paintings were mutilated because they were badly protected after Breasted's one-day study does not do justice to the extremely dangerous situation at the time.

⁵¹ Breasted 1924, 59, 75, 76-90; Cumont 1926, 41-52, Pls XXXII-XXXVI; Perkins 1973, 38-41, Pl. 10.

⁵² The fragmentary paintings of several heads from the temple of Zeus Theos that are now kept at the Yale University Art Gallery give the best impression of the original quality of the portraits in the Konon fresco. I was able to study these paintings in 1992. I am especially grateful to Dr. Susan Matheson, curator of ancient art, for her assistance. The paintings appeared to be in good condition, and probably only need cleaning. Since they are the only extant examples of these early paintings from Dura, it is regrettable that they are not on display in the Yale Art Gallery.

⁵³ TEAD, VII-VIII, 217

to Zeus Megistos on behalf of himself and his grandchildren⁵⁴. In the temple of Bel as well the temple of Zeus Theos, the paintings adorned the walls of the naos. At the time of their execution, the naos was in all likelihood not open to the public, but accessible only to a small group of people⁵⁵. Clearly, therefore, these paintings are not intended as public statements. Instead, the paintings are primarily votive. They place the dedicator and his family under the protection of the deity whose cult image is also present in the temple. In this respect, they are the iconographic counterpart of many dedicatory inscriptions from Dura, in which the dedicator erects something for the well-being of himself and his family⁵⁶. On a social level, both paintings and inscriptions assert and reinforce a sense of collective identity that centred on the worship of a particular deity⁵⁷.

The type of religion exemplified by the paintings from the temple of the Palmyrene gods and the temple of Zeus Theos is best defined as family religion. The special worship of a patron god by families was traditionally an important element of religious life in Babylonia, Syria and Israel⁵⁸. This 'god of the fathers', was venerated by successive generations of the family. The cult was inherited rather than chosen, and hence the idea of religious

competition is out of place here. The subject matter and the private nature of the Dura frescoes accord well with this type of religion, that served to reinforce a sense of collective family identity. Family religion did not exclude participation in other cults. The women from Konon's family, for example, are also attested in inscriptions on the steps from the pronaos of the so-called temple of Atargatis⁵⁹. Furthermore, these family cults by no means contradicted the political powers. An altar from the temple of the Palmyrene gods from the year 52 CE is dedicated to Zeus Soter for the well-being of Seleukos, the commander and governor of the city⁶⁰.

In addition to cult groups in which family ties are the constitutive factor, we know of several cults practised by migrants at Dura. In these cases, membership was not based on family ties, but on provenance. The gods migrants chose to worship in their new place of residence were not the patron gods of the family, but the main deities from their place of origin. Such was the case with a group of people from Anath, a village situated about 120 kilometres downstream of Dura on the Euphrates, and people from Palmyra, the famous caravan city located 230 kilometres to the west of Dura. In 54 CE, a religious association dedicated a shrine (andron) in the southwest angle of the city walls to the god Aphlad, the god of the village Anath, for the well-being of Seleukos, the commander of Dura⁶¹. The eleven dedicators belong to six different families. The fact that members of different families explicitly acted as dedicators is exceptional in Dura. Like their god, these people probably came from Anath. Possibly they were traders that settled in Dura. In their new home they dedicated a shrine to the god of their village, i.e. to their communal deity. By mere chance, we also have the votive relief that functioned as the cult relief of the shrine⁶². It pictures a god, clad in a Hellenistic cuirass, standing on two griffins. The dedicatory inscription on the relief refers to the image as ἀφειδρύσις, implying that it copies the original cult icon of the god in Anath⁶³. If this interpretation is correct, it is a clear indication that the social and religious identity of this group was based on their common origin rather than family ties. Unfortunately, it is not known whether members of this association participated in local cults as well. However, it is clear that their religious differentiation by no means

⁵⁴ Cumont 1926, 359-361, no. 5; Contra Perkins 1973, 40, who suggests that Lysias is an ancestor of Konon. If my suggestion that we are dealing with a family cult is correct, this implies the temple was probably dedicated to the god Zeus Megistos. This implies that the god wearing Parthian trousers at the back of the naos is probably to be identified as Zeus Megistos.

⁵⁵ The graffiti from the naos referred to by Downey 1988, 108, in her reconstruction of the clientele of the temple, in all likelihood date from the Roman period, when the situation had changed drastically.

⁵⁶ Dijkstra 1995, 259-281.

⁵⁷ Contra Elsner 2001, who argues that the act of sacrifice in itself functions as the identity marker in these paintings.

⁵⁸ Van der Toorn 1996.

⁵⁹ Cumont 1926, nos 109-110, both dated to 61/62 CE. An in-depth analysis of Dura's epigraphic material is much needed to throw more light on the relationships between various pagan cults. Unfortunately, this is beyond the scope of the present article.

⁶⁰ Dijkstra 1995, 264.

⁶¹ TEAD V, 113; Dijkstra 1995, 265-266.

⁶² Downey 1977, 9 and 193-194.

⁶³ TEAD V, 106-113 and 118-119, Pl. XIII. For the interpretation of ἀφειδρύσις as cult and cult statue, see Robert, 1965.

undermined the political powers of their new residence. On the contrary, the andron was dedicated to the well-being of the strategos of Dura. Apparently, religious differentiation did not cause problems as long as one paid homage to the local authorities.

The religious behaviour of people from Palmyra during the Parthian period is very similar. Palmyrenes are attested in several sanctuaries at Dura. In 33 BCE, two Palmyrenes from two different tribes founded a sanctuary on the plateau outside the city walls that they dedicated to their gods Bel and Iarhibol⁶⁴. Bel and Iarhibol are the most important deities from Palmyra, who were worshipped by the entire population of the oasis. Clearly, the two dedicators preferred them over their family gods because they were looking for a common religious ground⁶⁵. The Palmyrene sanctuary inside the city in block H1 should probably be dated slightly later than the extramural temple⁶⁶. As far as one can tell from the inscriptional evidence, the temple was attended primarily by Palmyrenes. It cannot be established with certainty to whom the temple was dedicated. Two votive reliefs that originally flanked the missing cult icon have come down to us. Both were dedicated in 159 CE by a man from a well-known Palmyrene family, who had himself represented as a Palmyrene priest on the two reliefs⁶⁷. It follows from the stone and the style of the sculptures that they were fabricated in Palmyra. One relief depicts the Gad of Dura, whereas the other represents the Gad from Palmyra (Pl. 4).

Apart from the Gad of Dura, all deities attested in these two Palmyrene temples at Dura are distinctively Palmyrene. The most conspicuous feature of these gods is the municipal significance of their cult in Palmyra. In view of the role of religion in the process of identity construction, it can be said that the attachment to the official gods of Palmyra manifests the wish of the Palmyrene community to preserve its local cultural and religious identity in a foreign environment. The religious differentiation of the Palmyrene community by no means implied religious competition. On another relief from the temple, the same Palmyrene priest who worships the Gad of Palmyra pays homage to the patron deity of Dura. This god is in all likelihood to be identified as the city god of Dura-Europos, who was probably the object of a cult in the so-called temple of Zeus Megistos, one of the oldest sanctuaries

in the city⁶⁸. The presence of this Durene god in a Palmyrene sanctuary bears witness to the respect Palmyrene immigrants paid to the major cult of their new place of residence. Religion, politics and social structure were inextricably interwoven in antiquity. By honouring the patron god of Dura, the Palmyrenes submitted to the socio-political institutions this cult embodied. The reliefs representing the Gad of Tadmor and the Gad of Dura amply exemplify the fact that several levels of religious involvement co-existed peacefully.

People from Palmyra also took the initiative to found a Mithraeum, located in block J7, to the south of tower 2. Like the synagogue, the Christian building and temple of Bel, the Mithraeum was covered by the embankment of the city wall and this explains the excellent state of preservation of the painted decoration in the cult niche. Most scenes illustrate the life and deeds of Mithras. In addition, one finds signs of the zodiac and two figures in Parthian dress with a Phrygian cap⁶⁹. These paintings date from around 240 CE, when the Mithraeum was reconstructed and enlarged for the second time. Undoubtedly, these enlargements were due to the growth of the military community. The earliest datable evidence from the shrine consists of a small bas-relief with a Palmyrene dedicatory inscription dated to 168-169 CE. Two years later, a certain Zenobios, commander of the Palmyrene archers, dedicated a second relief (Pl. 5). Palmyrene archers served in the Roman Army, and it may safely be assumed that the advent of the cult coincided with the beginning of Roman control in 165 CE.

The two early votive reliefs that were found incorporated in the arched cult niche at the rear wall of the sanctuary picture Mithras killing the bull, the conventional cult icon in Mithraic sanctuaries. It has rightfully been pointed out that this cult icon is predicated on a set of structural reversals of

⁶⁴ TEAD VII-VIII 319-320; PAT no. 1067; Dirven 1999, 199-202, Pl. I.

⁶⁵ For an extensive discussion, see Dirven 1999, Ch. II.

⁶⁶ Dirven 1999, 222-260.

⁶⁷ Downey 1977, nos 4 and 5, 14-19, Pls 4-5. Dirven, 1999, 230-235 (inscriptions) 245-248 (reliefs), Pls III, IV.

⁶⁸ Dirven 1999, 111-124.

⁶⁹ For the paintings, see Rostovtzeff 1934, 180-207; Perkins 1973, 49-52; Cumont 1975, 169-194.



Pl. 4. Relief depicting the Gad of Dura, dated 159 CE (photo T. Kaizer, YUAG, Dura-Europos collection)

normal Roman sacrificial practice⁷⁰. The violent way in which the animal is killed is different, as is the fact that the god rather than a worshipper acts as sacrificer. In Mithraic iconography, the image of sacrifice is itself a cult icon rather than a votive supplement to an independent cult image. However, it is false to assume that norms of sacrifice were completely reversed by the Mithraic community of Dura. In fact, it can be shown that the Dura Mithraeum used a traditional iconographic motif in a new context. For the most part, the images from the Dura Mithraeum accord with the standard iconography of the cult that can be found throughout the Roman Empire. Some aspects, however, are

very unusual or even unique, such as the two frescoes representing Mithras hunting and the two figures in Persian costume that flank the cult niche. Another highly unusual feature is the sacrificing dedicator Zenobios and the two accompanying figures represented on the right-hand side of the larger votive relief dated to 170-171 CE⁷¹. In the past, these accompanying figures were identified as members of Zenobios' family. Although it was not uncommon for members from the same family to participate in the cult of Mithras, it seems that this was not the case in Dura, where the cult was dominated by soldiers. In all likelihood, Zenobios is not accompanied by his children, but by soldiers of his unit. This follows from the personal names in the inscription, as well as from the military costumes of the small figures⁷². Significantly, members of the Mithraic community were also represented on the side walls of the nave of the Mithraeum in the third century CE. Numerous

⁷⁰ Turcan 1981, 352-364; Elsner 1995, 210-221.

⁷¹ Scenes of sacrifice are seldom added to the tauroctony. I know of one instance from Mannheim: Vermaseren 1960, no. 1275.

⁷² Dirven 1999, 266 and 271.



Pl. 5. Votive relief from the cult niche of the Mithraeum at Dura-Europos, dated 170-171 CE
(Photo T. Kaizer, YUAG, Dura-Europos collection)



Pl. 6. Worshipper. Fresco fragment from the middle Mithraeum, dated ca 210-240 CE
(Photo L. Dirven, YUAG, Dura-Europos collection)

polychrome fragments of painted plaster were found on the benches alongside the walls, that can be reconstructed as portrait figures that are identified by accompanying Greek inscriptions (Pl. 6)⁷³. The worshippers in the Dura Mithraeum are a variant of the local iconographic tradition that depicts the dedicant with his family before a deity.

The representations of cult initiates instead of family members in the decoration of the Dura Mithraeum, points to a radical shift in the constitution of this religious community. To the Palmyrene and Durene viewer, the new use of a traditional iconographic motif probably suggested that the cult association now functioned as their family. This accords with the well-known fact that people consciously chose to be initiated into the mysteries of Mithras. Combined with the little we know about the organisation of the cult, this seems to have provided its members with an alternative religious identity. The worship of Mithras did not preclude the worship of other deities. However, the alternative religious identity it offered to its members could pose a serious threat to traditional, family-based religions. It is far from clear whether this was indeed the case in Dura. As far as may be inferred from the evidence, adherents of the cult were soldiers who served in the Roman army. These men were separated from their families and

therefore the cult may just as well be interpreted as a substitute for the family-based religions they had left behind.

Another religious group that probably arrived at Dura with the Roman army, was a group of Christians that assembled in a building located alongside wall street, south of the main gate⁷⁴. Like the nearby synagogue, it was rebuilt and decorated in the forties of the third century. Unlike the synagogue, it was not the assembly hall that was decorated with paintings, but a much smaller room that was used for the cult's initiatory rite. Hence we may assume that this decorative program was designed and viewed by people who were initiated into the mysteries of the cult. At the time of its discovery, about 40 % of the original decoration was still extant. The paintings depict symbolic and narrative scenes from the sacred writings of the Christians.

Like Judaism, Christianity existed in third-century Syria in a number of varieties that are only partially known to us⁷⁵. In the case of Dura, we are in the fortunate position that in addition to the frescoes we have another indication to the type of Christianity that flourished here: a Greek fragment of the Diatesseron, the gospel-harmony composed by Tatian in the late second century CE⁷⁶. Tatian's theological views influenced the process of selecting gospel passages. Hence it is not unreasonable to suppose that the Christian community at Dura resembled the Christian groups that were strongly influenced by Tatian's doctrine and practised an austere sexual ascetism, *enkrateia*⁷⁷. Unlike the followers of Marcion and Mani, these so-called enkratite Christians did not have strong anti-Jewish ideas. On the contrary, their own struggles with these and other anti-Jewish movements compelled the Enkratite Christians to deal with Jewish material, without identifying themselves with Judaism. This is confirmed by the paintings from the baptistery, two of which depict scenes from the Old Testament. Most illustrative in this respect is the painting in the lunette above the font against the west wall, the pendant to the pagan cult icon. Here we see the Good Shepherd accompanied by his flock in the main field, whereas a scene showing the Temptation of Adam and Eve is painted in the lower left hand corner (Fig. 3)⁷⁸. This pictorial footnote amplifies the main image and fits excellently with Tatian's theology, which teaches that Adam lost his divine mind because he made the

⁷³ Rep. VII-VIII, 90-91. The only parallel are the paintings of the Mithraeum of S. Prisca, which depicts worshippers moving towards the sacred repast of Mithras and Sol (Vermaseren and Van Essen 1965, 149, no. 3) and panel 3 on the wall of the Mithraeum at S. Maria Capua Vetere (Vermaseren 1971, 19-20, with Pl. XVIII).

⁷⁴ The personal names provided by the few inscriptions found in the Christian building suggest that the community consisted largely of members of the Roman garrison: Kraeling 1967, 108-110.

⁷⁵ For a description of various Christian groups in Syria during the first centuries of the Common Era, see Drijvers 1992, 129-137.

⁷⁶ Kraeling 1935. Although the fragment was found in wall street and not in the Christian building proper, it is reasonable to suppose that this gospel harmony was used by the Christian community that gathered in the building in block M8.

⁷⁷ Drijvers 1992, 129-131.

⁷⁸ Kraeling 1967, 56 and 202-203, argues that Adam and Eve were added after the decoration of the baptistery, in order to modify the original meaning of the programme. In my view, Kraeling's arguments that the scene was a later addition are not convincing. His suggestion that it criticises the original programme is highly speculative.

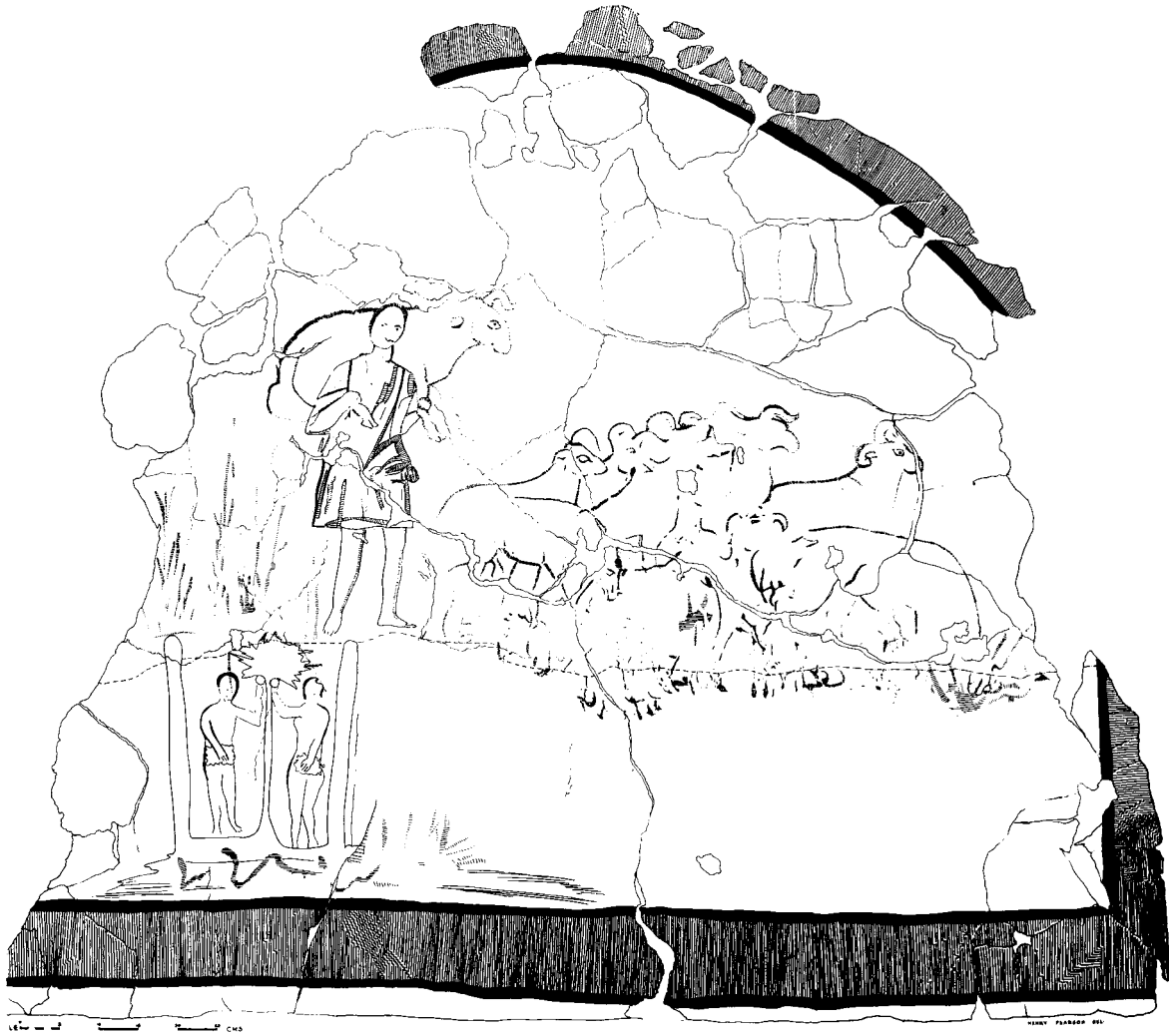


Fig. 3. Fresco from the niche of the baptistry: the Good Shepherd and his sheep with the Adam and Eve (drawing after Kraeling 1967, Pl. XXXI)

wrong choice, as a consequence of which he became a mortal and sexual being. This Fall can be undone by conversion to Christianity and sexual abstinence. In the decoration of the baptistry, the new message literally rises above the old teaching.

The incorporation of scenes from the Old Testament in the decoration of the baptistry shows the adaptation and assimilation of Jewish traditions in a Christian context. As such, it may be interpreted as an affirmation of a Christian identity. However, we have no way of knowing whether this incorporation of Jewish traditions into the Christian faith implied a hostility towards the Jewish community and vice versa. Strong anti-Jewish sentiments only come to the fore in Syria from the late fourth

century onwards, in the writings of, for example, Ephrem Syrus and John Chrysostom⁷⁹. In Syriac literature, Jews are seldom mentioned and are usually completely ignored. The only exception to this rule is the *Doctrina Addai*. In the sermon that Addai delivers before he dies, he warns his flock not to be friendly with Jews. This suggests that Christians were on speaking terms with the Jews and may have gone so far as to visit the synagogue⁸⁰. The attraction of Jewish rites to Christians was tenacious and widespread. At the end of the fourth

⁷⁹ Millar 1992.

⁸⁰ Drijvers 1992, 140, following Howard 1981.

century, John Chrysostom feels the need to condemn members of his congregation in Antioch who take part in Jewish rites and festivals⁸¹. We have no way of knowing whether the Christian congregation in Dura also visited the local synagogue. It is, however, a possibility that is not contradicted by the evidence at our disposal.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the many cult groups that lived together in the small city of Dura-Europos, the decoration of their respective sanctuaries does not unmistakably testify to religious competition. Two reasons can be adduced for this. First, the images do not speak for themselves, and second, most cults in Dura were not competitive. Representations are open to multiple meanings, that vary according to the social and religious position of the onlookers. Consequently, one can only hope to retrieve the meaning if the milieu of the community that used the buildings is known. It proved impossible to ascertain the theological position of the Jewish community. For this reason, the interpretation of these paintings is bound to remain problematical. Even the panels that illustrate the superiority of the Jewish God over other deities do not necessarily apply to the contemporary gentile environment. Of course, it is possible that the Jews of Dura related these historical events to their own situation. There is, however, no further evidence to substantiate this hypothesis. As far as we can tell, there is no proof that the Jewish community felt threatened in its existence, let alone that they actively tried to win converts for their faith.

This brings us to the second reason for the lack of competition in the decoration of sanctuaries. If this decoration is interpreted in the light of the contextual evidence, it becomes apparent that the nature of most cults at Dura was not competitive. People worshipped the gods of their family and the city gods. They did not think that their belief system surpassed the beliefs of others, nor did they fight among themselves for adherents. Participation in these cult groups was compatible with civic, local or family activities. One was simply born into a particular group and the participation in one cult

by no means excluded participation in another.

In Dura, three cult groups deviate from this pattern: Mithraism, Christianity and Judaism. With the possible exception of the Jewish community, Mithraism and Christianity were only introduced in the period of Roman domination. In varying degrees, these three cults considered their beliefs superior to the beliefs of others. Membership involved an element of choice, although choice was probably limited in the case of Judaism. In view of the different character of these three cults, it is not surprising that the decorative programmes of their sanctuaries differs as well; families are no longer the constitutive factor. Instead, their religious identity is built around the sacred stories of the cult. This is exemplified by the decoration of their sanctuaries, in which narrative representations replace the families⁸². Due to our limited information about the social and religious background of the three communities, it is difficult to establish whether, and if so, how the decoration is used to outdo potential rival cults. The replacement of the family by images of cult initiates perhaps implies that the Mithraic community tried to replace ancient family structures. The small painting of Adam and Eve below the Good Shepherd in the baptistery incorporates Jewish tradition into the new Christian message and provides it with a new, and in the eyes of the Christians, greater significance. It should be stressed, however, that these are exceptions to the rule. Contrary to our present day situation, religious pluralism did not result in competition amongst the adherents of different cults in Dura-Europos.

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⁸¹ Wilken 1983.

⁸² In the case of Judaism, sacred narrative and ancestral religion coincide.

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Documenting and Digitizing the Art of the Near East in The Index of Christian Art, Princeton University

Colum HOURIHANE

When the Index of Christian Art first started life in 1917 its focus was understandably on what was known of the medieval world. In those early days of art history¹ the majority of publications dealt with the arts of the Western world and even then relatively little was known compared to the present day situation. Rather naively, the medieval works that were known at that time in the early part of the century lead the founder of the Index and subsequent directors to claim that they would have catalogued every work of medieval art within ten years of its foundation. This was a claim, which was repeated every few years until 1955 at which stage



Pl. 1. Charles Rufus Morey, founder of the Index of Christian Art

they realized the futility of such statements and abandoned that claim. By that stage, the founder of the Index, Charles Rufus Morey had died and the whole study of the medieval world had expanded considerably (Pl. 1).

In the early years of the Index some three or four journals and a corresponding number of monographs on medieval art were published every year but by the early sixties the number had increased significantly and nowadays it is impossible to keep count of what scholarly work has been published, never mind what is available on the Internet. This increase in publications with a particular focus on the Western world has meant that the Index of Christian Art has in the past had a slightly imbalanced emphasis on the arts of the West. The Index was largely dependant on published material and when comparatively little existed works from the Near East could not be included. This however, was not to the total exclusion of the Near East as we shall see and any publications that existed were included in the files of the archive.

As an archive, the Index of Christian Art (<http://ica.princeton.edu>) is unique and it is the only iconographically based resource in existence that caters for students of the medieval world².

¹ Amongst the best descriptions of the development of art history in the United States are those by Lavin, Marilyn 1983, *The Eye of the Tiger: The Founding and Development of the Department of Art and Archaeology, 1883-1923*, Princeton University, Princeton, and Smyth, Craig Hugh and Lukehart, Peter 1993, *The Early Years of Art History in the United States*, Princeton.

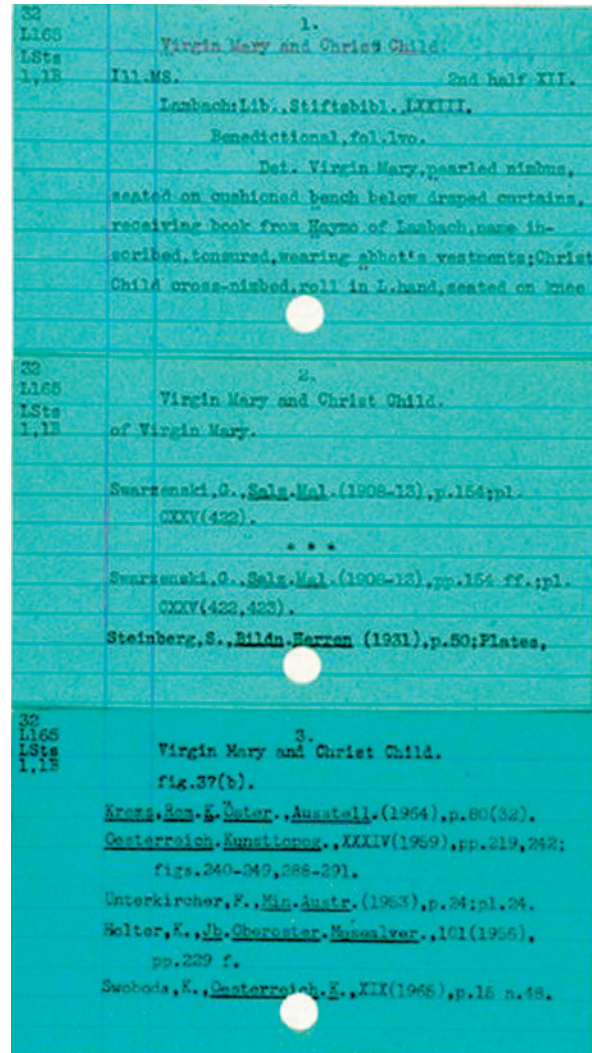
² The entire history of the Index has yet to be written but some highlights are included in articles by Isa Ragusa 1998, 'Observations on the History of the Index', in two parts, *Visual Resources, An International Journal of Documentation, Specula Issue on the Index of Christian Art*, XIII, 3-4, 215-252, and Colum Hourihane 2002, 'They Stand on His Shoulders, Morey, Iconography and the Index of Christian Art', in: C. Hourihane (ed.), *Insights and Interpretations. Studies in Celebration of the Eighty-Fifth Anniversary of the Index of Christian Art*, Princeton, 3-16.

A group of professional art historians with specializations in particular areas such as manuscripts, sculpture, Late Antique or Byzantine art to name just a few of the areas covered, catalogue works of art from the early Apostolic period to the end of the sixteenth century using an iconographic approach. Beginning with Alpha and Omega and ending with St. Zwentibold of Lorraine (a tenth century French saint) we can provide iconographic access to several hundred thousand works of art using an in-house thesaurus of twenty seven thousand subject terms. It is possible for example to examine illustrations of ladders or personifications, individual saints or concepts in seventeen different media ranging from enamels to metalwork, paintings manuscripts, mosaics and so forth. All of the other classification fields such as date, provenance, ownership, bibliography and so forth are also included for these works.

The Index is arranged in two file systems-the first of which is textual and records (on over one million file cards) the main subjects of the work of art, the medium, date, bibliography, ownership and so forth, but also describes with a controlled vocabulary in a free-text format, the subject matter of the work. As a system the iconographic approach caters for the high-level descriptor as well as the inter-relationships between the various elements in the actual description. Colours, relationships, gestures and placements are all recorded in a near standardized format in these descriptive passages. It is the level of scholarship, accuracy and detail that never ceases to amaze users of the resource (Pl. 2).

Accompanying this first file is a collection of somewhere in the region of two hundred thousand black and white images which illustrate the subject matter found in the first file. The images are arranged on the basis of medium and secondly on the level of location.

The archive was developed by a dedicated group of scholars over eighty-six years and has its parent home in Princeton University with copies of the complete files distributed throughout the world. In 1940 the first copy was established at Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection of Harvard University in Washington, D.C. -the preeminent center for Byzantine studies in the United States. In 1951 Cardinal Spellman presented Pope Pius XII with a copy of the Index and this is still housed in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana in Rome. The



Pl. 2. Three consecutive cards showing a typical entry for a manuscript (Lambach: Stiftsbibliothek, LXXIII, 12th Century Benedictional, fol. 1v) with the primary subject of Virgin Mary and Christ Child

third copy was acquired by the Universiteit Utrecht, in 1962 and the last copy was housed in the University of California, Los Angeles, until 2002 at which stage it was transferred to the Getty Research Center in Los Angeles. These copies, as well as the original at Princeton, are updated and extended every year.

Computers were introduced relatively late into the Index when they were first applied to the existing paper files (as described above) in 1991. From 1997 onwards the card files were no longer maintained and all new data is now recorded electronically. The

digitization of the existing paper files is underway with approximately twenty five percent of the archive already available. When computers were introduced into the archive the opportunity was also taken to upgrade the data elements recorded even though they may have disagreed slightly with the aims of the founder. It was Morey's wish that the researcher be given as objective an account of the data as was possible and consequently any subjective elements were excluded³. However, by the time computers were introduced, new art history had developed along with the many expectations that computers had given to the user. Fields such as school and style for example were included and have proved to be popular with the user. Such responses to user needs however did not impact on the existing standards that had been used in the archive for over eighty years and any new fields were added to the existing structure.

The particular interests of the founder, Charles Rufus Morey in the early Christian period are well reflected in the files of the archive. In the early days of the Index at least one of the cataloguers spent time in Egypt researching material for incorporation in the existing file structure. The Index is particularly strong in its holdings of art of the Late Antique period. Most of the Roman sarcophagi for example have been included as indeed has a large collection of the ivories, frescoes, mosaics and metalwork. A similar strength in the Index is to be found for Byzantine and Crusader art due in part to the high profile that these styles have had in publications over the last fifty years. When it comes to the more remote and less studied sites of the Near and Middle East however the situation is different and our holdings have not been as inclusive as we would have liked. The better known sites such as Saqqara or Bawit have all been included in the files and the records on such material is unparalleled but it is material that is in many ways of its time and in need of updating to reflect the significant increase in interest, research and publications in this field⁴.

Throughout its history, the Index has operated as a unique yet passive archive. It is true that it has documented works which have not previously been published but such campaigns have been limited and its major strength has not only been the scholarship of the indexers but the synthesis of material

in the archive. It has brought together as much of the published material and restructured the approach to it using iconography as the base line. Entering into the age of the computer however has brought about a new role for the archive and it has assumed the role of original publisher especially in the area of manuscripts. The whole collecting policy of the Index changed considerably at the end of the twentieth century when the archive began the process of photographing and documenting previously unpublished works. One of the first such ventures afforded the archive was the collaborative project developed with the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, whereby the Index of Christian Art will, over a period of six years, photograph and iconographically catalogue all of the Western manuscripts in that collection. Covering over five hundred manuscripts, this collection includes many outstanding examples of Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, and Byzantine manuscripts which have never before been photographed, catalogued or published in their entirety. All of these projects have been grant funded and also included the digitization and classification of the Firestone Manuscript Collection in Princeton University. This collection will add a small yet significant collection from Princeton. When completed these two collections will provide an unrivalled coverage of the medieval manuscript in all its forms from the codex to the start of the printed book, from all of Western Europe. These electronic facsimiles added significantly to the already considerable corpus of Near Eastern works which had been developing in the Index since the early 1990's.

³ The objectivity of the Index cataloguing structure possibly influenced Morey's colleague and friend Erwin Panofsky in the formulation of the latter's theoretical framework for analyzing iconography which was published some thirty odd years after the foundation of the Index. See Hourihane 2002 (as in note 3).

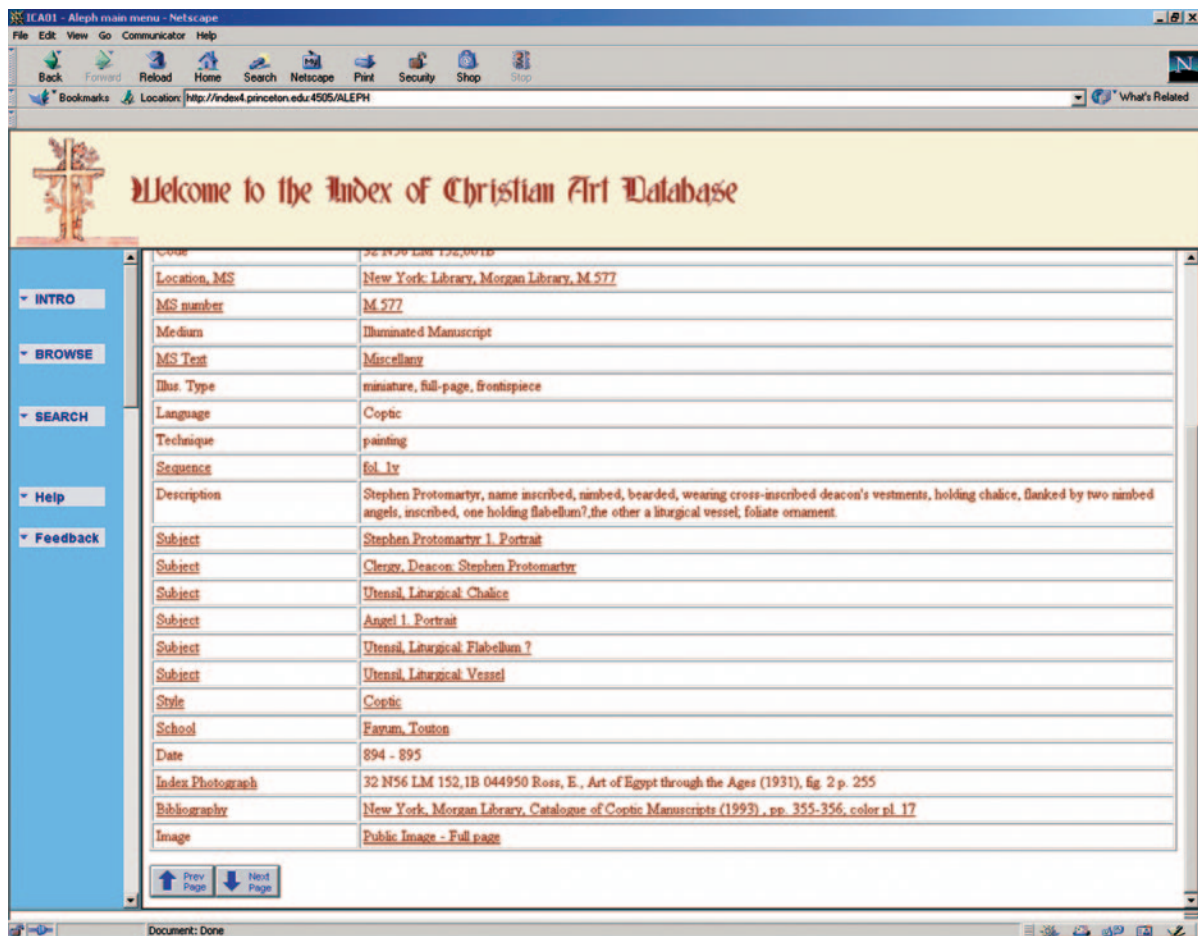
⁴ Saqqara (organized on a cell basis) for example had first been incorporated into the archive in 1907-1908 thanks to the pioneering publications of James Quibell (1905-1923, *Excavations at Saqqara I-VI*, Cairo) whereas the Monastery of Apollo in Bawit (organized on a chapel basis) had been incorporated in 1939 thanks to the works of Jean Clédat (1904-1916, *Le Monastère et la Nécropole de Baouit*, Le Caire). Both of these sites have of course been extended with new publications which have been incorporated into the Index.



Pl. 3. Virgin Mary, Annunciation (Morgan Library, Ms. M. 597, fol. 1v.), Fayum, Touton, 913-914



Pl. 4. Stephen Protomartyr (Morgan Library, Ms. M. 577, fol. 1v), Fayum, Touton, 894-895



Pl. 5. Screen dump of the Index of Christian Art record for Morgan Library Ms. M. 577 fol. 1v showing the iconographical analysis and catalogue structure

Paralleling this focus on manuscripts the Index has also attempted to develop such projects in other media and these include for example the classification of the Alison Frantz Archive of images of Byzantine sculpture—mainly decorative in design or the Peter Harbison image collection of Irish high crosses.

Our recent interest in the art of the Near East was extended when the Index received a grant in 1999 to undertake a prototype database that would lead to the development of an Index of Islamic Art in Princeton University. In advance of beginning a catalogue that would eventually be based mainly on the non-representational it was decided to focus initially on the Christian elements in Islamic art. To date some four hundred records, mainly of manuscripts and metalwork have been developed and incorpo-

rated into the Index database, in advance of the formal development of a separate database that will be dedicated to all the arts of Islam. The range of subject matter broadened our existing subject terminology to include such headings as Muhammad's Night Journey. The cataloguing of this material highlighted the need to create a separate thesaurus for this art style. Issues such as the use of the term 'Islamic' in the Style field (which technically speaking does not exist) or the need to incorporate a date field that would record Dynastic Affiliation (for example Ayubid (1187-1254) were short-term solutions that we used so that the records could be incorporated. Nevertheless, it is clear that this art form and its classification is an issue that cannot be catered for in existing structures and will need to be considered.

With such a focus on working with other archives and our wish to publish original material

in the Index we began to work collaboratively with the Paul Van Moorsel Center for Christian art and Culture in the Middle East (<http://www.tcno.leidenuniv.nl/index.php3?c=30>)⁵. Based in the University of Leiden the centre comes under the auspices of the Faculty of Art (Department of Languages and Cultures of the Near East), and was officially opened on June 22, 2001. The first phase of the project was an agreement that the Index would digitize the extensive image holdings of the founder of the Center, catalogue the material for incorporation in the Index website and in return make the data available to the Center for its own use. The material came from the personal collection of Van Moorsel and was derived from his many travels in Egypt which was to provide us with a unique coverage of many monuments of Coptic art. Ranging from the icon collection in the Coptic Museum in Cairo to the pre-restoration frescoes of St. Anthony's Monastery, these images have been digitally enhanced and preserved for posterity. Under the scholarship of Dr. Lois Drewer of the Index of Christian Art, the work has progressed significantly and most of the material is now searchable on the Internet application of the Index. It is possible for example to retrieve the important image of the Annunciation of the Virgin from the Church of the Virgin in Deir al-Surian and to see the development of this theme compared to the nine hundred and fifty nine other examples of the subject which are currently on the Index website. Its contextualization has added enormously to our understanding of the development of iconographic themes and the addition of non-Western material is crucial.

The addition of this material has filled significant *lacunae* in the Index's holdings and enabled comparisons to be made between different cultures at the same time. In many instances the addition of this new material has enabled the Index to use its existing photographic holdings and to add newer images which have the advantage of being in colour.

Given that Coptic art represents the merging of a number of traditions and its use may be secular rather than strictly religious, its incorporation in the Index files has extended the role of the archive considerably and made it truly an Index of medieval and not just Christian art. If the Van Moorsel Archive focused largely on the painted image, the next collaborative venture of the Index focused on



Pl. 6. *Female Pagan Dancer from a Coptic tapestry; fifth-sixth century; Newark Museum (inv. no. 72.136)*

different media and the classification of a collection closer to the home of the Index in Princeton. Newark Museum has one of the finest collections of Coptic art in North America thanks to Susan Auth, the Curator of Ancient Mediterranean art in that museum. She has assiduously purchased a significant collection of such works in the latter part of the twentieth century ranging from textiles and icons to metalwork and sculpture (Pls 6 and 7).

⁵ Particular thanks are due to Hans Brandhorst, a pupil of Paul Van Moorsel who first introduced me to the possibility of the Index working with the Paul Van Moorsel Center which at that stage had just been founded. The project could not have been undertaken without the collaboration and untiring work of Mat Immerzeel and assistance of Karel Innemée. The most recent publication devoted to Paul Van Moorsel and reflecting the research of his former pupils is found in *Visual Resources, an International Journal of Documentation* XIX, No. 1, 2003.



Pl. 7. Horsemen from a Coptic tapestry; sixth-seventh century; Newark Museum (inv. no. 75.154)

Over two hundred objects ranging in date from the sixth to the thirteenth century detail this culture and highlight the iconographical merging of various traditions. In a collaborative venture this collection has now been digitized and iconographically classified in the Index database and made available to the scholarly community. Its inclusion has extended not only the media of the archive but also the period under study as well as the iconography especially in the field of mythological characters such as Dionysius or Europa and the Bull.

Paralleling these collections which have focused on the art of the Copts we have also attempted to move outside of these geographic borders. Studentships in Israel have enabled us to work with the Israeli Antiquities Authority as well as the Israeli Museum into the many early Christian sites that are currently being excavated in these areas. Text and image records are prepared for the Index and transferred to Princeton where they are edited before being added to the Internet database. Institutional

projects such as these are also being paralleled by contributions from individual scholars such as Erica Cruikshank Dodd of the University of Victoria, British Columbia, the foremost expert on Syrian art who has generously given the Index the opportunity to digitize her collection of Christian images from the Near East including her large corpus of wall paintings from the Lebanon. Mat Immerzeel has also added to our image collection especially in the field of Lebanese art. These are initiatives which we would like to extend and will hopefully add to our knowledge of the art of this unique area. It has posed problems for us as to how to structure place names (when so many variants exist), the location of individual works within large structures especially when most of these sites have never been satisfactorily documented and the issue of dating (especially when large brackets such as 'Egypt, sixth century' seem to cover a multitude and may not be specific enough for user needs. These are minor problems however when compared to the many iconographic treasures that these works are giving to the archive. There have been claims and ambitions to develop an Index of Coptic art but it would be misleading and unrepresentative as it is an art form which fits perfectly into the existing index structure. On the other hand, the wealth of decorative and non-representative imagery with foliate, vegetal, geometric and interlace ornament found in this art needs to be more fully documented.

We have a number of other initiatives planned which will also add to this significant corpus within the next few years and enable us to redress the slight imbalance that was created in the early years of the Index. The material is diverse and fascinating and adds significantly to our understanding of the development of themes and subjects in what was once the cradle of Christianity.

Holy Horsemen and Crusader Banners. Equestrian Saints in Wall Paintings in Lebanon and Syria

Mat IMMERZEEL¹

For centuries the Qalamun, the mountainous area between Damascus and Homs in Syria, has been populated with Byzantine and Syrian Orthodox communities (Fig. 1). In a few sanctuaries, wall paintings, unfortunately often damaged, testify to its flourishing Christian culture in the period from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. In the early 1970s paintings were discovered in the Church of Mar Sarkis (Saint Sergius) at Qara, which a few years later were the subject of a preliminary study by Jules Leroy (1974-1975). Only fragments of the upper part of the paintings have survived, showing an unidentified female saint, the Virgin *Galactothrophousa*, Saint John the Baptist, and the saints Theodore and Sergius on horseback (Pls 1, 2). A particular element which attracted Leroy's attention was the white banner with a red cross fixed to Saint Sergius' lance. The presence of this symbol, predominantly associated with the crusaders, was an unexpected discovery in a region that was never annexed by Latin forces. The banner, and some other details such as the diadems crowning the horsemen's heads, call to mind two icons in Saint Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai. These remarkable similarities led Leroy to the following conclusions:

"Ces quelques constatations nous invitent à conclure que nos peintures appartiennent à un monde de contacts d'Orient et d'Occident tel que nous l'offre la Syrie à l'époque des Croisades. La chose est certaine pour ce qui concerne les fresques de Qara. Elles nous conservent malheureusement fort délabrée, la représentation de deux saints cavaliers dont le réplique se trouve dans une série d'icônes du Sinaï que K. Weitzmann a attribuées à des peintres occidentaux travaillant en Orient sur des modèles byzantins transformés par les habitudes occidentales. Deux d'entre elles sont particulièrement éloquentes, parce qu'elles sont à peu près identiques à nos peintures. Vu l'état lacunaire où celles-ci se trouvent actuellement, il n'est

*pas possible de raisonner sur les vêtements, comme le fait Weitzmann, mais elles nous présentent encore ce qui, aux yeux du même auteur, fait l'originalité de ces soldats de l'époque des Croisades, de diadème perle avec une grosse pierre au centre, qui n'a pas de précédent dans l'art byzantin"*².

The French scholar was referring to a large icon decorated with a Virgin *Hodegetria* at one side and the equestrian saints Sergius and Bacchus at the reverse, and a smaller piece showing Saint Sergius with a female suppliant (Pls 3-5). Kurt Weitzmann regarded both pieces as prominent examples of the group of crusader icons in the Monastery of Saint Catherine. Certainly the iconographic and stylistic analogies with the horsemen of Qara are eye-catching, the more so because on the icons too Saint Sergius carries the red-crossed flag. Lucy-Anne Hunt elaborated this obvious connection in her study on the presence of female supplicants in the art of the crusader states and the input of native artists (1991; republished in 2000). The striking similarities with several wall paintings in Lebanon executed in a comparable style, such as those in the Church of Mar Tadros (Saint Theodore) in Bahdeidat (no. 12; Pls 14-18), led her to conclude that the origin of the icons should be sought within Syrian Orthodox (West Syrian) circles in the County of Tripoli. Contacts with fellow believers in the Qalamun on the other side of the Lebanese mountains would explain the presence of similar images in Muslim territory.³

¹ The author would like to express his gratitude to Maria Sherwood-Smith and Bas Snelders for their assistance in writing the present article.

² Leroy 1974-1975, 99.

³ Hunt 2000a, 79-80, 112, Figs 4, 5.



*Pl. 1. Saint Theodore; Qara,
Church of Mar Sarkis
(© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)*



*Pl. 2. Saint Sergius; Qara,
Church of Mar Sarkis
(© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)*



*Pl. 3. Icon: Virgin Hodegetria; Monastery
of Saint Catherine (reproduced through the
courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria
Expedition to Mount Sinai)*



*Pl. 4. Reverse of the icon of the Virgin: saints
Sergius and Bacchus (reproduced through the
courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria
Expedition to Mount Sinai)*



*Pl. 5. Icon: Saint Sergius; Monastery of Saint
Catherine (reproduced through the courtesy of
the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria
Expedition to Mount Sinai)*

This point of view would have pleased Leroy, who died in 1979, since Syrian Orthodox art was one of his many specialisations. From his earlier article on the so-called 'Syrian Renaissance' (1971) it is apparent that Leroy's main concern was illuminated Syriac manuscripts; the few Lebanese wall paintings known at that moment had escaped his attention. This omission is regrettable, since the murals of Lebanon and Syria illustrate above all the revival of both the Syrian Orthodox and Melkite (Byzantine Orthodox) Churches. The impressive quantity of discoveries made since then provides enough material to develop new visions on the rich cultural heritage of Christianity in this part of the Middle East. At present, almost ten sites with decorations in the West of Syria and about thirty in Lebanon have been inventorized and published by several authors, in particular Abdo Badwi, Erica Cruikshank Dodd, Jaroslav Folda, Nada Hélou, Levon Nordiguian, Yuhanna Sader, Stephan Westphalen, and myself (see bibliography). In view of the steadily increasing number of discoveries, more publications are to be expected in the near future.

In their present state, the majority of these paintings are reduced to fragments; some have almost completely vanished. Nevertheless, in almost 50% of the cases documented, the presence of mounted saints comparable to those on the icons in the Sinai and the murals in Qara can be ascertained. This observation confirms the immense popularity of soldier martyrs represented on horseback in a wide area to the East of the Byzantine Empire, ranging from Southeast Russia and Georgia to Ethiopia. Although scholars such as Cruikshank Dodd and Hunt went into detail on several horseman representations in Lebanon and Syria, the affinities between these examples and the icons in the Sinai remain to be elaborated further on. The relative unfamiliarity of art historians with this material stands out in Christopher Walter's recent monograph on the eastern warrior saints (2003), which stops at the frontiers of the former crusader and Islamic states. Partly to fill in this gap, the present study aims to present a general overview of the equestrian saints of Lebanon and Syria. Aspects to be discussed are the coming into being and predecessors of this theme in the art of the Middle East, and its illustrative role in the artistic interaction between native Christians and Westerners living in the crusader territories, in particular the County of Tripoli. All the wall paintings of equestrian saints

in Lebanon, Syria and Palestine, and both icons in the Monastery of Saint Catherine are classified at the end of this article.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The majority of the decorated sanctuaries are concentrated in the region between the cities of Tripoli and Jubeil (Byblos; the Frankish city Giblest), i.e. on the territory of the former County of Tripoli, and between Damascus and Homs in the Qalamun, with sporadic discoveries outside this region, although within the borders of former crusader territory. The sites with images of equestrian saints are more or less evenly dispersed throughout these areas (Fig. 1):

Lebanon:

- Between Tripoli and Batrun:
 1. Cave Church of Mart Marina near the village of Qalamun.
 2. Church of Mar Mtanios in Deddé (Pl. 21).
 3. Church of Saydet Rih near Enfé (Pl. 28).
 4. Church of Mar Girios near Hamat.
- In the mountainous area south of Tripoli (Kura), traditionally a region with a predominantly Byzantine Orthodox population:
 5. Deir Hammatur near Qusba.
 6. Church of Mar Girios in Rashkida.
- In and near the Qadisha Valley:
 7. Cave Church of Saydet Durr in Hadchit near Becharreh.
 8. Cave of Mar Assia near Hasrun.
- In the mountains between Batrun and Jubeil, a region with a Syrian Orthodox and now mainly Maronite tradition:
 9. Church of Mar Saba in Eddé al-Batrun (Pls 6-9, 22).
 10. Chapel of Saydet-Naya in Kfar Schleiman.
 11. Church of Mart Nohra and Mart Sophia in Dmalsa (Fig. 5).
 12. Church of Mar Tadros in Bahdeidat (Pls 14-18).
 13. Church of Mar Elias in Blât (Pl. 29).

Syria:

- North of the Lebanese mountains:
 14. Extramural chapel of the crusader Crac des Chevaliers.
- Qalamun:
 15. Church of Mar Sarkis in Qara (Pls 1, 2).
 16. Chapel of Deir Mar Yaqub near Qara.



Fig. 1. Map of Lebanon and Syria

17. Chapel of Deir Mar Musa al-Habashi near Nebk (Pls 11, 12, 19, 20).

– Palestine:

18. Church of the Hospitallers at Abu Gosh near Jerusalem.

In spite of the fairly poor state of many of these paintings, which hinders a detailed analysis of all scenes, there are still so many common features visible that in theory gaps can easily be filled in with elements known from other images (Fig. 2).

⁴ For the relations between Saint Theodore Stratelates and Saint Theodore Tiron, see Walter 2003, 59-64.

⁵ Cruikshank Dodd 2001, 51; Grotowski 2002; Walter 2003, 130.

All representations share a side view on a warrior saint on a white or brown horse. Inscriptions in Greek or Estrangelo (Syriac) make it possible to identify some of the saints as George, Theodore Stratelates⁴, Demetrius, Sergius, or Bacchus. In other cases, specific iconographic details reveal their identity. Saint Theodore, with black hair and pointed beard, kills a snakelike dragon and rides a brown horse (Bahdeidat; no. 12a, Pl. 14; Deir Mar Musa; no. 17e; Pl. 12). The horse of Saint George is white; the addition of a small pillion rider holding a ewer and cup and a sea teeming with fish are indicative of the Rescuing of the boy from Mitilene, a popular theme in the Eastern Mediterranean⁵. The boy was a Christian slave from Mitilene on the Island of Lesbos, who, while pouring out wine for his master and praying to Saint George, was saved by the latter and brought back home across the sea.

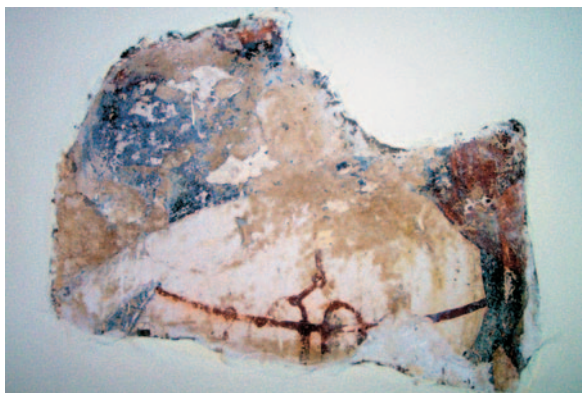
Location	Saint	Horse	mantle	crown	shield	attributes
Qalamun	<i>Demetrius</i>	brown	?	?	?	
Deddé	Theodore?	brown	red	x	x	banner
Id.	George?	?		x	x	banner
Id.	?	brown	brown	?	x	
Enfé	Theodore?	brown	?	?	?	woman
Deir Hamatur	George?	white	?	?	?	soldier
Hamat	?	white	?	?	?	
Id.	?	?	?	?	?	
Raskida	?	?	?	?	?	
Hadchit	George?	white	red	?	?	
Eddé al-Batrun	George	white	?	?	?	sea
Id.	?	brown	red	?	?	banner
Id.	?	white	?	?	?	
Dmalsa	?	?	red	?	x	banner?, boy
Bahdeidat	<i>Theodore</i>	brown	brown	x	x	supplicant, dragon
Id.	<i>George</i>	white	red	x	x	supplicant, boy, sea
Blat	Sergius?	?	brown	x	x	
Krak des Chev.	George	white	?	?	?	sea
Qara	<i>Theodore</i>	brown	brown	x	x	
Id.	<i>Sergius</i>	?	brown	x	x	banner
Deir Mar Musa	?	brown	brown	?	?	
Id.	George	white	?	?	?	sea
Id.	<i>George</i> L1	?	?	?	?	
Id.	<i>Bacchus</i>	brown	brown	x	x	banner
Id.	<i>Sergius</i>	white	brown	?	x	banner
Id.	Theodore	brown	?	?	?	dragon
Id.	<i>Theodore</i> L1	brown	brown	?	?	
Id.	?	white	brown	?	x	

Fig. 2. Characteristics of mounted saints in Lebanon and Syria

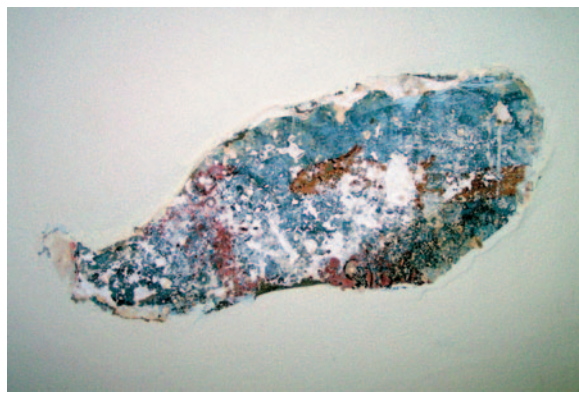
The best-preserved instance is in Bahdeidat (no. 12b; Pl. 16); fragments of this scene are present in Eddé al-Batrun (no. 9a; Pls 6, 7), perhaps in Dmalsa (no. 11; Fig. 5), the extramural chapel near the Crac des Chevaliers (no. 14), and Deir Mar Musa (no. 17b; Pl. 11)⁶. In Deir Hammatur, the rider attacks a man dressed as a soldier at the feet of his horse (no. 5). Here too, the white

colour of the horse suggests that the painting renders Saint George defeating his persecutor King

⁶ In Egypt Saint George, the boy and fish are rendered among other equestrian saints on an icon in Deir Abu Sefein (Saint Mercurius) in Cairo (thirteenth century; Skalova/Gabra 2003, 184-185). Another icon with this subject is attributed to a crusader artist, but here there is no sea (British Museum, London; Cormack/Mihalarias 1984, 138; Hunt 2000a, 87, Fig. 11).



Pl. 6. Horse; Eddé al-Batrun, Church of Mar Saba
(© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)



Pl. 7. Sea with fish; Eddé al-Batrun, Church
of Mar Saba (© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)

Dadianus or Diocletian, another widespread motif in the East⁷.

Medieval depictions of the famous story of Saint George slaying a dragon are unknown from Lebanon, Syria and Egypt⁸, although a local tradition situates this event near Beirut⁹. The nearest contemporary murals rendering the dragon legend have been found in Cappadocia¹⁰ and in Cyprus¹¹. Count A. de Piellat described the scant remains of a mounted saint in the Hospitallers Church at Abu Gosh near Jerusalem as Saint George slaying the dragon, but this identification is questionable since in his watercolour copy of the image neither an inscription, nor dragon can be discerned (no. 18).

⁷ Walter 2003, 128-129, with further references.

⁸ Immerzeel 2003, 278-280.

⁹ Astruc 1959, with further references; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 273.

¹⁰ For example: Yusuf Koç Kilisi, Avcılar (eleventh century; Thierry 1974; Walter 2003, 127-128, Pl. 28); Chapel 28 in Göreme (eleventh/twelfth century; Restle 1967, Vol. I, 52; Vol. II, 129-130, Pls 246-247), Church of the Forty Martyrs near Suves (1216-1217; Restle 1967, Vol. I, 157-158; Velmans 1983, 156-157; Walter 2003, 128).

¹¹ Church of Panagia Asinou: Saint George depicted with a round shield and crown (ca 1200; Stylianou/Stylianou 1985, 137-138, Fig. 70; Mouriki 1995, 351, Fig. 13; Hein/Jakovljevic/Klein 1996, Abb. 26); Church of Panagia at Moutoullas (1280): Saint George depicted with a triangular shield, with the victim rendered as a man with a snake's tail (Mouriki 1984, 193-194, Figs 20, 21; Stylianou/Stylianou 1985, 328-329, Fig. 195; Walter 2003, 129).

¹² Nicolle 1998, no. 843.

¹³ Sader 1997, 123: "(...) the figure of a tall person. Only one eye is left. Beneath this there is a little child wearing dark clothing."; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 380: "(...) une tête de

The saints are crowned with a beaded diadem and dressed in a coat of mail, or hauberk, with short sleeves, worn over a short tunic and breeches, with a *chlamys* waving behind their back. Their armour consists of a lance, sometimes provided with a banner, and a decorated round shield, partly hidden from view behind the saint's body. Saddles are richly decorated, while bridles and stirrups are carefully rendered. The horsemen are usually set against a dark blue background and a hilly landscape with sporadic vegetation, to which in the scene of Saint George and the boy from Mitilene a wavy blue water surface with fish is added. In a few cases, a divine hand reaches out of heaven in the top corner in front of the saint (no. 9c, Pl. 8; nos 12a/b, 15a). The military dress and arms also feature on both icons in St. Catherine's Monastery, although there are no shields on the double-sided specimen (nos 19 and 20). David Nicolle described the icon of Saint Sergius in his publication on the arms and armour of the crusading era, and concluded that the saddle, comparable to that of Saint George in Bahdeidat (Pl. 16), is western, whereas the saint's archery is Seljuk, Mamluk or Mongol¹².

A variant on the horseman theme is the representation of the Cypriot saint Mammias mounted on a lion in the Church of Mar Saba in Eddé al-Batrun (no 9d; Pl. 9). Although the painting is damaged, the lion can be distinguished by the shape of its relatively large head, mane and its ochre colour. This scene is included in this study because either it was not mentioned by other authors, or it was described as a horseman¹³. The presence of a

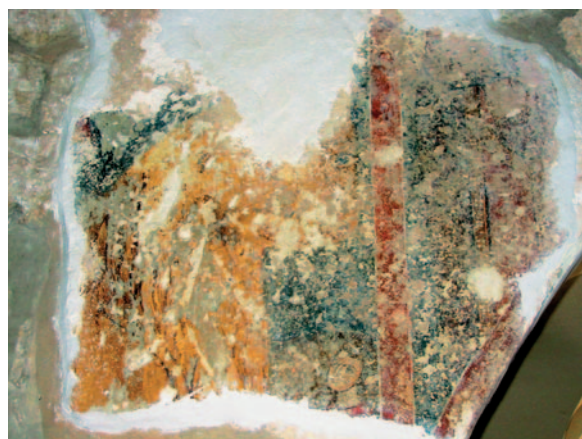


Pl. 8. Horse's head; Eddé al-Batrun, Church of Mar Saba
(© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)

church dedicated to Saint Mammas in the same village supports our interpretation¹⁴.

In some churches warrior saints are displayed standing frontally. In Lebanon this ancient variant appears on the north wall of the Church of Saydet in Qusba (traces of a leg, hauberk and shield)¹⁵. In Syria a similar rendering can be deduced from fragments on a column in the Church of Saint John the Baptist in Saydnaya and in the Chapel of the Prophet Elijah in Ma'arrat Saydnaya (Saint Demetrius and Saint George, named in Greek inscriptions; late twelfth century to ca 1260)¹⁶. In the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, Saint George and Saint Leonard are painted on columns, with their names in Greek and Latin¹⁷.

On stylistic grounds, the wall paintings of Lebanon and Syria can be divided into two general clusters. The first group consists of representations typified by formal elements betraying Byzantine influences and provided with Greek



Pl. 9. Saint Mammas; Eddé al-Batrun, Church of Mar Saba
(© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)

inscriptions. Its most striking representatives are concentrated in the Melkite region to the south of Tripoli, for example in the Church of Mar Fouqa (Saint Phocas) in Amiun, which dates from the late twelfth or early thirteenth century¹⁸. The second group is characterised by the linearity of the design, a preference for detailed decoration, the almost total absence of indications for shadows and highlights, and the round heads, betraying some influence of Islamic art¹⁹. Prominent examples are the murals in Deir Mar Musa (layer 3) and in the Syrian Orthodox area near Jubeil, e.g. in Bahdeidat and Eddé al-Batrun, all with inscriptions in Estrangelo. The term 'Syrian' style is used to distinguish between this group and the

cheval et en dessous le buste d'un jeune personnage, inberbe". Other authors discussing the murals of Mar Saba do not mention this scene at all (Cruikshank Dodd 1997-1998; Hérou 1999 and 2003b). Saint Mammas riding a lion appears in several later Cypriot murals, e.g. in the Church of the Holy Cross of Agiasmati near Platanistasa from 1495 (Stylianou/Stylianou 1985, Fig. 118).

¹⁴ Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 178.

¹⁵ Immerzeel 2004.

¹⁶ Immerzeel, *Prophet Elijah*.

¹⁷ Kühnel 1988, 72-78, Pls XXII-XXIII, XXIV/38.

¹⁸ Sader 1997, 165-177; Cruikshank Dodd 1997-1998, 257-264; *idem* 2001: 80, 82; Rousseau 1998, 28; Hérou 1999, 22-23, Pls 24, 25; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 237-239, 282, 286, 293-295, 341-342, 359, 363-364; Hunt 2000b, 84, Fig. 8; Westphalen 2000, 491-493, Abb. 7-12; Immerzeel 2004, no. 8; Pls 1, 2.

¹⁹ Cruikshank Dodd 2001, 112-114; 117-119; Immerzeel 2004.

'Byzantine' paintings, but as a matter of fact several decorative programmes display a hybrid formal language, for example in Qara (no. 15). The shared features testify to fruitful contacts between different artists and workshops active in the County of Tripoli and those working in the Emirate of Damascus.

The chronology of these paintings depends on a few fixed data and on stylistic arguments. The only accurately or relatively well dated instances are those in Deir Mar Musa (layer 1: between 1058 and 1088; layer 2: 1095; layer 3: 1208²⁰). With a few exceptions, the other programmes displaying mounted saints date from the thirteenth century. Their *terminus ante quem* depends on the historical events in the area, in particular the gradual advance of the Mamluk army from 1260 onwards. The Maronite Patriarch Stephan ad-Dwaihi (seventeenth century) quoted a now almost entirely lost Syriac inscription in the Church of Mar Saba at Eddé al-Batrun, which mentions the interruption of the decoration in this church in 1264 due to military activities²¹. The village of Qara was captured by the Mamluks in 1266²², while Crac des Chevaliers fell in 1270 and Tripoli in 1289. The programmes in Bahdeidat and Eddé al-Batrun in all likelihood date from about 1250-1270; this dating is based mainly on stylistic considerations and Hélou's assumption that they were painted by the same master who worked in Eddé al-Batrun, where, as stated, the

work was interrupted in 1264²³. The exceptions are the horsemen in Abu Gosh (ca 1170) and perhaps the representation of Saint Demetrius in Qalamun. A second, probably thirteenth-century, layer showing scenes from the life of Saint Marina with Latin inscriptions was applied over this image, implying that the first layer is older.

ORIGINS OF THE EQUESTRIAN SAINTS

The equestrian saint was, and still is, one of the most popular subjects in the art of Eastern Christianity. Holy horsemen are particularly abundant in medieval decorative sanctuary programmes in Egypt, e.g. in Deir Malak Gabriil (Fayyum), Deir al-Chohada (Esna), Deir Anba Antonius (A.D. 1232/33), and the Church of Abu Sefein in Old Cairo²⁴. Such representations also appear in Coptic illuminations, woodcarvings and icons²⁵. The earliest documented forerunners of these horsemen came to light at the site of the Monastery of Saint Apollo in Bawit (fifth to seventh century). Its murals included mounted local saints rising their hands in prayer²⁶, as well as militant cavalymen. Photographs of Bawit's North Church show a column painted with an unidentified horseman killing a dragon with his lance²⁷. A comparable image was found in Chapel XVII, and has come down to us in a watercolour copy²⁸. This saint is believed to be Sissinius, who is driving his spear into a half-naked woman called Alabasdris.

Since Saint Sisinnius had built up a reputation in the theological disputes with Manicheans, this scene, as well as that of the dragon slayer in the North Church, renders a central element of the horseman iconography: the struggle between good (the Christians) and evil ('the others'), and therefore pre-eminently symbolises this dualistic doctrine in Christian belief. A limestone relief from Bawit provides another example of this concept. A rider pierces a hardly recognisable snake with his lance, placed below an arcade resting on two columns.²⁹ To the extreme right, the tail of a second horse is distinguishable, suggesting that this block belonged to a frieze decorated with several horsemen. The popularity of horsemen in Egypt is apparent also from representations of riders killing animals or human adversaries in minor art forms, in particular textile decorations. Often, however, there is no evidence for a specific Christian content, or they represent common hunting scenes³⁰. Magic amulets

²⁰ The reading of this date is still subject to discussion. Whereas Cruikshank Dodd prefers the Seleucid year 1504 (A.D. 1192/93; Cruikshank Dodd 2001, 170), Paolo dall'Oglio reads A.H. 604 (A.D. 1208; Dall'Oglio 1998, 16). Dall'Oglio's reading took place after the restoration of the inscription, and is very probably the correct one.

²¹ Cruikshank Dodd, 1997-1998, 271; Hélou 2003b.

²² Schmidt/Westphalen, *Mar Yakub*.

²³ Hélou 2003b.

²⁴ Van Loon/Immerzeel 1998; Immerzeel 2003, 276, with further references.

²⁵ See the examples in Hunt 2000b; an icon with six equestrian saints, who in their appearance are highly similar to those in Lebanon and Syria is present in the Church of Abu Sefein in Old Cairo (thirteenth century; see note 6).

²⁶ Clédat 1999, 111-112, Photos 102-104 (Chapelle LI); 156-157, Photos 138-141 (Chapelle LVI).

²⁷ Clédat 1999, Photo 191; Rassart-Debergh 2000, 77, Pl. I, a.

²⁸ Clédat 1904, Pl. LVI; Brune 1999, 233, Abb. II.5; Walter 2003, 241-242, 271.

²⁹ Clédat 1999, Photo 208 (Musée du Louvre, Inv. no. 17075).

³⁰ See Török 1971 and Brune 1999.

depicting Solomon on horseback killing a female demon, also found outside Egypt, were produced as early as the third century and may have been at the basis of the later purely Christian variants³¹, but they were most probably not the primary source of inspiration.

The introduction of Christianised horsemen was an almost natural development in the history of the horseman iconography widespread in the antique world. Generally speaking, the rider in art was proper to cultures accustomed to the use of the horse as a mount. Scenes consisting of mounted hunters and warriors battling with animal or human adversaries were countless in Antiquity. A theme with a long history, illustrating the victory of a mounted hero over an obnoxious mythical creature, is Bellerophon on Pegasus killing the four-headed monster Chimaera³². The first versions date from the seventh century B.C., while it also features as late as the fifth century on an ivory from Constantinople in the British Museum³³. In its composition and intentional expressiveness, this mythical battle scene is clearly identical to its Christian counterparts. In Late Antiquity, the Egyptian god Horus was also rendered as a soldier on horseback killing a crocodile (Seth), the most famous representative being a limestone window lattice now in the Musée du Louvre, probably from the third or fourth century³⁴. Since this particular rendering of the struggle between the falcon god as a rider and Seth does not occur in old Egyptian art, this relief actually represents a Romanised variant of an ancient myth.

As in the case of other early Christian themes, imperial iconography too may have inspired the creation of Christian variants. In Late Antiquity, emperors were portrayed on horseback with defeated enemies at their feet. In this matter, two coins minted in Alexandria in the first half of the fourth century are extremely informative³⁵. The first one shows Constantine II (337-340) with a recoiling soldier and Tellus below his galloping horse. Although the image suggests a common battle scene, it must be borne in mind that numismatic iconography had outstandingly political connotations. This instance propagates the victory of the state over its enemies; the imperial rider was the personification of the good government defeating its political adversaries (*virtus augusti*). On the second coin, Constantius II (337-361) is seen with a snake between the legs of his rearing horse



Fig. 3. Coin image: Emperor Constantius II defeating a snake (after Török 1971, Abb. 5)

(Fig. 3)³⁶. An object resembling a spear or sword is stuck in the snake's head. The bad reputation of snakes, or dragons (Greek: δράκων; Latin: draco) was widespread in the antique world, and one did not have to be a Christian to understand the symbolism of the scene. The intentional propagandistic message is beyond all doubt because of the added inscription DEBELLATOR HOSTIVM ('defeater of the enemy').

The composition of the battling horseman was clear and its visual impact easily understandable to contemporaries; friend and foe were recognised at a single glance. This artistic imagery allowed artists and their clients to visualise changes of rule. With this principle in mind, the step from state propaganda to religious message appears to be a small one. Soldier martyrs were considered true

³¹ Walter 2003, 34-37, Pl. 17; see also Török 1971, 299-300, Abb. 7.

³² Art. *Pegasus*; *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (LIMC) VII, 1/2, nos 152-235.

³³ Inv. no. BM.MME 56.6-23.2.

³⁴ Inv. no. E4850; Török 1971, 167-180, Pl. 1; Walter 2003, Pl. 14.

³⁵ Török 1971, 289, Abb. 4, 5.

³⁶ Other coins display an enthroned emperor trampling a snake with human head, e.g. on two *solidi* found in Arles, resp. of Majorian (457-461) and Libius Severus (461-465); Guyon/Heijmans 2002, 50, 207, nos 17/12 and 17/13.

Christian warriors, who, through their tragic death, ultimately emerged victorious from the religious struggle with Roman authority. From the Christian point of view, the roles were now reversed. Hostile emperors such as Diocletian and Julian ended up as defeated enemies. In contrast, the actual victims of persecution, martyred soldiers such as George and Demetrius, were promoted to heroic victors³⁷.

This early Christian subject survived the Arab conquest of large parts of the Byzantine Empire in the seventh century. In an illumination in a manuscript from Fayyum (ca 900), Saint Theodore attacks a snake with a man's head (called 'demon')³⁸. From about the eighth century, one finds three mounted saints in the Church of al-ʿAdra in Deir al-Surian. Only the name of Saint Victor remains legible. He is depicted on the south wall, with his victim, Emperor Diocletian, sitting in front of the horse³⁹. A triptych and an icon painted in a simple, provincial style in the Monastery of Saint Catherine are the subject of discussion concerning their date

and origin⁴⁰. The triptych consists of a central panel showing the Ascension, a left wing representing Saint Theodore killing a dragon, and a right wing where Saint George is injuring a man, possibly King Dadianus (Diocletian?). The icon represents Saint Mercurius defeating Emperor Julian⁴¹. Weitzmann dated these pieces to the ninth or tenth century and opted for a Palestinian origin, but recently Hunt has attributed them to thirteenth-century Coptic artists⁴².

Although the main body of pre-Islamic representations of mounted saints known were discovered in Egypt, a few exceptions demonstrate their dissemination over other parts of the Middle East. On several pieces of minor art such as bracelets and seals, some of which are believed to date from the sixth century and to originate from Syria, Saint Sergius is represented on horseback, holding a lance topped with a cross⁴³. He was a Syrian saint whose sanctuary stood in Resafa, and whose reputation spread far beyond this city on the Euphrates⁴⁴. A silver plate in a private collection renders a similar rider, who has long curly hair and is beardless. Unlike Saint Sergius, who is seldom represented attacking an adversary⁴⁵, he pierces a snake with a human head. It is said to be found at Homs, together with other silver objects from the seventh century⁴⁶. In the Church of Mavruçan in Cappadocia, there remain traces of two nameless horsemen killing dragons, dated by Nicole Thierry to the seventh century as well⁴⁷.

These works of art testify once more to the long history of the iconography of mounted dragon slayers in the East, but there are a few indications that the theme was also known in Europe. Two terracotta reliefs found near Vinica in Macedonia show Saint Theodore on horseback with a snake impaled on his spear. The saint's identity is revealed in a Latin inscription (SCS THEODORUS DRACO). Presumably the reliefs were made before 733, at which date this region ceased to fall under Roman jurisdiction⁴⁸.

In the discussion on the familiarity with dragon slayers and military saints in Western Europe before the crusader period, the now lost Carolingian Arch of Eginhard with its abundant decoration, very probably rendered in relief, could well be a key monument⁴⁹. Its interpretation is, however, problematic. In a later drawing of the arch which has survived, one can discern on the inside of the arch two mounted dragon-slayers, though without

³⁷ Walter 2003, 31-32.

³⁸ From the Monastery of Saint Michael, Hamouli; Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, M 613; Depuydt 1993, no. 144/411, Pl. 19.

³⁹ Innemée/Van Rompay/Sobczynski 2001, [5-6], Ills 6, 7. Perhaps the two other warriors, both on the adjoining east wall, are Saints Menas and Vincent. These three saints often feature together, because their liturgical commemorations occurred on the same day (11 November; Walter 2003, 258, 268). Further interpretations cannot be excluded.

⁴⁰ Soteriou/Soteriou, 1958, Figs 30-31; Weitzmann 1967, B43-44, Pls XXIX, XCVII-XCVIII; Hunt 2000b, Figs 1, 4.

⁴¹ Galivaris 1990, 91-101, Fig. 11; Weitzmann 1967, B49, Pls XXXI, CIV; Hunt 2000b, 22-25, Fig. 11.

⁴² Hunt 2000b, 1-29, Figs 1, 4, 11.

⁴³ Key Fowden 1999, 35-43, Figs 6a-d.

⁴⁴ Key Fowden 1999; Walter 2003, 146-169; see also Dianne van der Zande's article in this volume.

⁴⁵ An exception occurs in the reliefs of the Armenian Church of Aght'amar near Lake Van, Turkey (915-921). Here the saint is killing an animal which looks like a lion; Saint George attacks a man and Saint Theodore a dragon; Der Nersessian 1965, 5, 19, Figs 49, 50; Walter 2003, 128-129.

⁴⁶ Mundell Mango 1987. The remaining objects are now in the Musée d'art et d'histoire in Geneva. For precedents of a snake with human head on coins see note 36.

⁴⁷ Thierry 1972, 258-263, Fig. 21; according to Walter (2003, 125, Pl. 27): Saints George and Theodore.

⁴⁸ Balabanov/Krstevski 1993, nos 44, 45, Taf. 8; Walter 2003, 51, 52 notes 42 and 44 (with further references), 55, 125, 275, Pl. 25.

⁴⁹ B.N. fr. 10440, fol. 45; Grabar 1978; Walter 2003, 293, Pl. 70, with further references.

haloes; to the left and right of the passage, one sees four standing soldiers, with spear, shield and haloes. The iconography of the frontally rendered holy warriors is known from the Byzantine tradition and also occurred in Egypt⁵⁰, but the question of whether the mounted figures were saints remains unanswered. A comparable problem in interpretation occurs with a Spanish illumination of 975, showing a horseman spearing a snake. As in the case of the dragon slayers on the Arch of Eginhard, nothing in particular marks him as a saint; apparently the scene refers to a secular combat, albeit with a religious connotation, namely the war against the Moors⁵¹. The most northerly representations of a non-Christian horseman with a snake occur in Viking art, e.g. on a plaque of a helmet from the seventh century, found at the burial ground of Vendel in Sweden⁵². The warrior must be Odin, who is accompanied by two birds (crows?) while a snake writhes in front of the horse, below the head of his spear.

To conclude, the representations of holy horsemen in Lebanon and Syria stand in a long iconographic tradition in the East, while the indications for the existence of such scenes in Western Europe are scarce, if not spurious. The oriental instances are the more interesting because they occur in a region populated with different Christian communities. These communities lived under Islamic rule, and between 1098 and 1291 some of them had to deal with Latin masters. In this period the Middle East was the meeting point of East and West, and this resulted in new mutual impulses that would profoundly influence the veneration and iconography of the holy horsemen, in particular Saint George.

CRUSADERS AND WARRIOR SAINTS

To the Byzantines, Saint George was the protector of soldiers and the army⁵³. Initially Western Europe venerated him as a martyr only, yet his acceptance as warrior saint by Latin Christians was just a matter of time and circumstances. Carl Erdmann refers to several Burgundian proclamation texts mentioning the names of Saint George, Saint Theodore and Saint Mercurius, the oldest versions of which may date to the tenth century⁵⁴. Contacts at a high level with the Byzantine court can be proffered as an explanation for this exceptional case.

Eastern influences also stood at the cradle of eleventh-century legends about Saint George's inter-

vention in battles on behalf of Latin forces operating in the East, but now at the level of warriors. According to Gaufrido Malaterra, who wrote down this story decades after this supposed to have occurred, Saint George manifested himself to Norman soldiers during the battle of Cerami in 1063⁵⁵. Similar interventions were said to have happened during the First Crusade, at first during the battle of Dorylaeum in 1097 and later on in the course of the attacks on Antioch and Jerusalem⁵⁶. In 1098 Antioch fell into Latin hands, although the decisive capturing of the city was not without difficulty. The anonymous *Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum* (ca 1100) tells how the mounted saints George, Mercurius and Demetrius opened the final attack at the head of celestial cavalry. This story is repeated in the *Gesta Regum Anglorum* by William of Malmesbury (ca 1090-1143), but now only Saint George and Saint Demetrius headed the army⁵⁷. Similar assistance was provided when the crusader army arrived at the gates of Jerusalem, one year later: according to Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* from ca 1260, Saint George, dressed in white armour with a red cross, offered a helping hand in capturing the Holy City⁵⁸.

The intervention of Saint George and his companions on behalf of Latin soldiers had precedents in the Byzantine tradition⁵⁹. Without doubt, on their way to the Holy Land the crusaders became acquainted with this phenomenon through the stories of oriental Christians or countrymen serving as mercenaries in the Byzantine army⁶⁰. The relatively

⁵⁰ E.g. icon of Saint Theodore (Coptic Museum); van Moorsel/Immerzeel/Langen 1994, no. 8, Pl. A1; Skálová/Gabra 2003, no. 5, 168-169.

⁵¹ Gerona Beatus, fo. 134v; Gerona Cathedral Ms. 7; Williams 1977, 16, 36, 99, Pl. 30.

⁵² Magnusson 1976, Pl. on 62.

⁵³ Erdmann 1935, 255.

⁵⁴ Erdmann 1935, 256-257 note 31.

⁵⁵ *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardii ducis fratris eius*, Bologna 1928, XXXIII, 8-13 (*Raccolta degli Storici Italiani*, T. V, I); Erdmann 1935, 122; Kühnel 1988, 75 note 448.

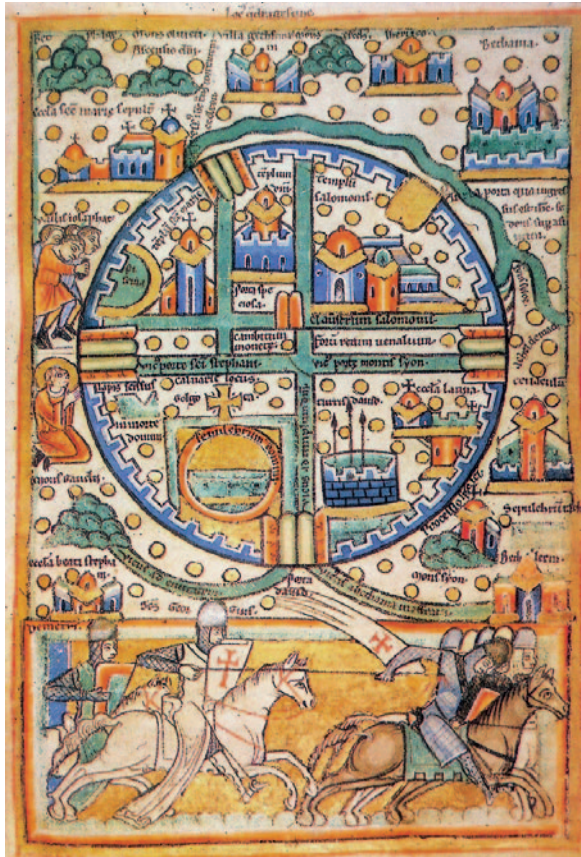
⁵⁶ Kühnel 1988, 75 note 448.

⁵⁷ *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, I, 365,3; R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson, M. Winterbottom (ed. and transl.), Oxford 1998.

⁵⁸ *Legenda aurea* 58; W.G. Ryan (transl.), *The Golden Legend. Readings of the Saints*, Princeton 1993, 242.

⁵⁹ Walter 2003, 133-134.

⁶⁰ Erdmann 1935, 260.



Pl. 10. Illumination: Jerusalem; MS 76 F 5; *The Hague, Royal Library* (© Royal Library, The Hague)

late account in the *Legenda Aurea* must have been a reflection of earlier variants popular in Western circles, as is witnessed by an illumination in a manuscript in the Royal Library in The Hague from the late twelfth century (Pl. 10)⁶¹. This miniature



Fig. 4. Coin image: Saint George (after Metcalf 1984, Pl. 4, no. 57)

explicitly presents the saint as a champion of the crusader army and seems to combine the saintly interventions at Antioch and Jerusalem. The circular Holy City is seen from a bird's-eye perspective and includes gates, roads, buildings and rivers. In the lower zone, Saint George and Saint Demetrius, both dressed as crusader knights and named in Latin, attack Muslim cavalymen. Saint George is prominently in the foreground and carries a white shield and a banner fixed to his lance, both with a red cross.

A visual witness of Saint George's particular importance to the Latins in Antioch, who presumably owed the capturing of the city to him, dates from shortly after the founding of the crusader states. The mounted saint, his name stated in Greek, is reproduced on coins minted in this city during the reign of Roger of Salerno (1112-1119), thus less than two decades after the founding of the Principality of Antioch⁶². He pierces a probably human adversary with his lance (Fig. 4)⁶³. Although this politically and religiously inspired coinage calls in mind the previously mentioned fourth-century coin images, it has no precedents in the Byzantine tradition; it may commemorate the decisive victory at Tell Danith in 1115⁶⁴, and is very probably the earliest representation of Saint George as a militant horseman in a Latin context.

⁶¹ MS 76 F 5; see the website www.mnemosyne.org/76f5.html; Cahn 1996, I, Pl. XVI; II: 166; Brandhorst 2003, 15, 23-24.

⁶² Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; Metcalf 1983, 7-8, no. 57, Pl. 4. See also nos 55 and 56.

⁶³ Metcalf describes the scene as: "The saint is shown on horseback piercing with a lance a Muslim or, more probably, a dragon (the detail is not clear on the available specimens)", but later on he decided in favour of the dragon scene, stating: "This is one of the earliest representations of St. George and the Dragon on a coin" (resp. Metcalf 1983, 7 and 8; see also his comment to Pl. 4, no. 55). On another piece published by Folda, no particular details of an adversary are distinguishable (Folda 1995, 88, Pl. 5.7). The reliability of Schlumberger's drawing of such coin displaying a dragon is disputable (Schlumberger 1878, 48-49, Pl. II, 11).

⁶⁴ Metcalf 1983, 7.

In the former crusader states no images of mounted saints from the eleventh century or earlier have come down to us, but they certainly existed in neighbouring Egypt, Cappadocia and the Emirate of Damascus. The presence of fragments showing Saint George and Saint Theodore in Deir Mar Musa in the Qalamun, painted between 1058 and 1088 (layer 1), testifies to the existence of this theme before the foundation of the Latin states, and just across their borders (nos 17b1; 17e1; Pls 11, 12). Such images of brave, victorious soldiers defeating the enemies of the Christian faith, actually the perfect personifications of knighthood and holy war, appealed to the newcomers. Decisive in their veneration of Saint George was the fact that the conquest of the Holy Land put his martyrdom in Lydda near Jerusalem into their hands. The sanctuary had been pulled down on the eve of the change of power, but in the third quarter of the twelfth century a new church was constructed to accommodate the saint's relics. Countless pilgrims frequented this building until its destruction by Saladin in 1191⁶⁵.

Illustrative for the Latin interest in indigenous saints is an event that occurred in Antioch in 1151, and is recorded in the *Chronicle* of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Michael the Great (1126-1192)⁶⁶. The son of the Frankish couple Henry and Isabelle was injured during an accident. As no doctor was able to heal the boy, his desperate parents called for the help of the monk Saliba from Deir Mar Barsauma near Melitene. He arrived with an icon of this saint. During their prayers, both the mother and Saliba had a vision of Mar Barsauma instructing them to build a church in his honour. Ultimately the boy was healed and the church was constructed in Antioch on the expense of the parents; the sanctuary was inaugurated in the presence of Syrian Orthodox and Latin prelates and civil authorities in 1156.

Henry and Isabelle must have been descendants of crusaders who had settled in Antioch after the conquest in 1098. This account expresses the increasing integration of Westerners, especially the generations born in the Levant. They had discovered new saints with miraculous powers. The relations of Latins with native Christians, their church buildings and their saints are reflected in several works of art in the Middle East, mainly in the presence of patrons, or donors, who are eternalised standing or kneeling in prayer near a saint. A telling example from the thirteenth century is

an icon in the Monastery of Saint Catherine, attributed to a Western artist who imitated Byzantine or local originals and worked in one of the crusader states. It represents Saint George and Saint Theodore on horseback, carrying small white flags bearing a red cross attached to their lances (Pl. 13)⁶⁷. A small bearded man kneeling in front of the former appears to be his namesake, because a Greek inscription identifies him as 'Georges de Paris'. This George may have been a pilgrim, who left his icon as a gift to the monastery or another sanctuary (the church in Lydda?). Noteworthy is also the veiled woman on the icon of Saint Sergius in the same convent (no. 20; Pl. 5). Whether this icon was painted by a Western artist or not, a matter that will be discussed below, there is consensus among scholars about the Western identity of the veiled supplicant (see below). Initially this icon may have been used for private devotion, explaining the absence of the lady's name⁶⁸.

The Western tradition of representing supplicant donors also found its way into the decorative programmes of churches. In an undisputed crusader environment it was introduced in the Crac des Chevaliers, where a supplicant with the Latin name SIMONIN was added to the Presentation in the Temple, supposedly painted by a native artist⁶⁹, while on the south wall of the exterior 'baptismal' chapel traces of a female supplicant with a black veil similar to the lady on the icon of Saint Sergius were found⁷⁰. Two more veiled women were rendered next to two images of the Virgin discovered during excavations in a ruined church at Beirut, and in this case too a Frankish identity is likely⁷¹. The southern annex of the Church of Mar Charbel in Ma'ad

⁶⁵ Mark-Weiner 1977, 3-10; see also: Cormack/Mihalarias 1982, 138, 141; Walter 2003, 23 note 44, 111 note 7, 119-122, 268.

⁶⁶ Michael le Syrien, *Chronique*, J.B. Chabot (transl.), Vol. III, Paris 1905, 300-304; Hunt 2000a, 118.

⁶⁷ Weitzmann 1982, 79-80, Fig. 64; Cormack/Mihalarias 1984, 137, Fig. 5; Hunt 2000a, 88, Fig. 12; *idem* 2000b, 17-18, Fig. 5.

⁶⁸ Hunt 2000a, 88.

⁶⁹ Folda 1982, 177-186; *idem* 1995, 398, 402, Pls 9.37g/h; Westphalen 2000a, 496, Abb. 27; *idem* 2000b, 402, Abb. 9.

⁷⁰ Lauffray 1946-1948, 14, Fig. 4; Folda 1982, 190, 195, Figs 12, 14; Hunt 2000a, 84.

⁷¹ Hunt 2000a, 84-85, Fig. 9; Nordiguan/Voisin 1999, 371-372; Immerzeel 2004, no. 27.



Pl. 11. Saint George; Deir Mar Musa al-Habashi (© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)



Pl. 12. Saint Theodore; Deir Mar Musa al-Habashi (© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)

was decorated twice, and on each layer two supplicants are present⁷². Furthermore, the head of a donor has survived near Saint Mammias on a lion in the Church of Mar Saba in Eddé al-Batrun (no. 9d; Pl. 9). These persons are anonymous, but in the Melkite Church of Mar Fouqa in Amiun, a Greek inscription near a male supplicant to the left of Saint Philip on the north wall reads 'servant of God, Philip'⁷³. One of the candidates mentioned by Cruikshank Dodd is Philippe of Ibelin, son of Balian Ibelin and the Byzantine Princess Maria Comnenus, and *Bailli* of Cyprus (d. 1227)⁷⁴.

Several particular details in the decoration of the Church of Mar Tadros in Bahdeidat reveal Latin patronage. Although its present denomination is Maronite, this sanctuary was Syrian Orthodox in the thirteenth century, since a manuscript in Deir as-Shife mentions the ordination of the Syrian Orthodox priest Behnam, son of the parish priest Na'aman, in 1256⁷⁵. All paintings are executed in the local 'Syrian' style, and reproduce characteristic regional themes and ornaments, while the addition of Estrangelo inscriptions as well points to Syrian Orthodox use and the local origin of the artist⁷⁶. Two equestrian saints are prominently depicted at the east end of the nave: Saint Theodore killing a snakelike dragon on the north wall, and Saint George opposite, each in the presence of a male supplicant.

The person kneeling in front of Saint Theodore's horse is a soldier (no. 12a, Pls 14, 15). He has a dark beard, is dressed with a long tunic worn over a hauberk covering his legs and arms, and has a small round helmet on his head. In these aspects he is comparable to the Western donor on the icon of Saint Nicholas in the Monastery of Agios Nicolaos tis Stegis near Kakopetria, Cyprus, from ca 1280⁷⁷. In contrast, the small, beardless person below the belly of Saint George's horse wears a so-called *mi-parti* dress consisting of a red and a blue half (no. 12b; Pls 16, 17). This vestment is known from Western Europe, and was worn, among others, by servants and artists⁷⁸. Unlike the accustomed rendering of donors facing the subject of their veneration, the person stands frontally with his hands raised in prayer. The reason for this attitude may have been that it allowed a better view of his dress, emphasising his humble position as a servant of the saint, like the supplicant Philip in Amiun (see above). Despite this modesty, he and the soldier near Saint Theodore belonged to the Latin aristocracy.



Pl. 13. Icon: saints George and Theodore; Monastery of Saint Catherine (reproduced through the courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai)

Significant in this matter is the coat-of-arms on a triangular shield, or Saint George's boot, visible to the left of the donor, consisting of a red eagle with spread wings and its head turned to the left, set against a somewhat darker red field (Pls 16, 18). The monochrome colour of the image is curious;

⁷² Sader 1997, 106, 108-110, Figs 72, 78, 88, 89; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 316-317, 319, 326-329; H  lou 1999-2000, 146, 154, Fig. 8; Immerzeel 2004, Pls 4, 5.

⁷³ Sader 1997, 168, Fig. 135; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 340, 341, 364; Hunt 2000a, 84, Fig. 8; Immerzeel 2004, no. 8, Pls 1, 2; Westphalen 2000a, 491-492, Abb. 12.

⁷⁴ Cruikshank Dodd 1997-1998, 256-258; see also Rey 1895, 412-417.

⁷⁵ Cruikshank Dodd 1997-1998, 266 note 35; Badwi 2000, 66.

⁷⁶ Badwi 2000; Cruikshank Dodd 1997-1998, 264-266; H  lou 1999, 16-17; Hunt 2000b, 112; Westphalen 2000a, 489-491, Abb. 2-6; Immerzeel 2004.

⁷⁷ Nicolle 1988, no. 842; Mouriki 1995, 370-374, Pl. 48; Evans/Wixom 1997, no. 263.

⁷⁸ Mertens 1983.



*Pl. 14. Saint Theodore; Bahdeidat,
Church of Mar Tadros, Bahdeidat
(Suzanne de Kruyck)*



*Pl. 17. Suppliant near Saint George;
Bahdeidat*



*Pl. 15. Suppliant near Saint Theodore;
Bahdeidat (Suzanne de Kruyck)*



Pl. 16. Saint George; Bahdeidat



*Pl. 18. Red eagle; Bahdeidat
(all © M. Immerzeel/ Paul van Moorsel
Centre)*

one would have expected a more colourful design. On the icon of Saint Nicholas in Cyprus mentioned above, a similar red eagle is also entered as the coat-of-arms of the donor, but here the field is white. This arises questions about the original copied in Bahdeidat.

A preliminary study of crusader coats-of-arms has revealed that such an eagle was rendered on a seal made of red wax and used by Alix, or Alice, de Champagne, Regent of Jerusalem and Queen of Cyprus (ca 1195-1246)⁷⁹. Her marriage to Bohemund V of Antioch, who was also Count of Tripoli, lasted only two years (1225-1227). A difference from the eagle in Bahdeidat is that the bird on the royal seal is crowned and its head turned to the right, throwing some doubt on the possible involvement of the queen in Bahdeidat's decoration. Nevertheless, it is tempting to suggest that the painter based his entirely red design upon a wax seal comparable to the one of Alix. The identification of this heraldry is crucial in the discussion on the chronology of the murals. Cruikshank Dodd and H  lou date them towards the fifties or sixties of the thirteenth century⁸⁰, but by then the queen had died already. Be it as it may, additional research will shed more light on the origin of the heraldic symbol.

Concerning the motivations for Latin sponsorship, the relations between Western and Syrian Orthodox Christians living in the crusader states were fairly good, as is apparent from the story of Henry and Isabelle⁸¹. In the County of Tripoli this friendship found expression in incidental mutual donations. In 1258 the West Syrian Maphrian Ignatius IV died in Tripoli and left part of his inheritance to the Latin Church⁸². According to Patriarch Stephan ad-Dwaihi, a lady called Hannah al-Frangiye bint al-Khabbaz (interpreted by Cruikshank Dodd as 'Anne the Frank, daughter of the baker', or 'Anne Boulanger') passed away in Ma'ad, north of Bahdeidat, in 1243. She was buried in the Church of Mar Charbel in this village, on which occasion the entrance was reconstructed at the expense of her father. The nameless tomb at this spot may be hers⁸³. Cruikshank Dodd suggests that the father was also responsible for the painting of the Dormition in the south annex of the church, yet this is unlikely as the donor in this scene is tonsured and dressed as a priest⁸⁴.

The Western veneration of equestrian saints can be given as a reason for the presence of Latin donors

in the paintings of Bahdeidat. Another contributory factor may have been the relatively direct relations between the landlords and their native subjects. Compared to the situation in Europe, the feudal system applied in the crusader states was small-scale, which, in the eyes of Joshua Prawer, means that "(...) direct personal knowledge and contacts were strong enough to make the simple machinery run smoothly"⁸⁵. From this point of view it is imaginable that, with the principle of *noblesse oblige* in mind, local landlords or even high-ranking nobles may have supported initiatives to decorate churches in villages on their territory. As a (self-determined?) token of their appreciated gesture they were portrayed alongside the saints they favoured. In the case of Bahdeidat the donors may have been members of the Giblest clan, who were descendants of the Embriaco family from Genua, the lords of Jubail⁸⁶, but this is merely a suggestion. If the identification of the supplicant Philip in Amiun as Philippe of Ibelin, the son of Maria Comnenus, is correct (see above), such contacts were maintained not only with Syrian Orthodox communities, but also with Melkites.

THE 'CRUSADER' BANNER

In the illumination in the manuscript in The Hague Saint George carries a white banner with a red cross, an attribute that would be inextricably linked with him in the coming centuries (Pl. 10). This flag also appears in several medieval representations of mounted saints such as George, Theodore, Sergius and Bacchus in Lebanon and Syria, albeit not necessarily within former crusader territory or in an irrefutably Latin context. As the red cross on a white field was the coat-of-arms of the crusaders, in

⁷⁹ Schlumberger/Chalandon/Blanchet 1943, 145, Pl. V, 13. For Alix see Runciman 2002⁵, 84, 104, 134, 149, 175, 179-182, 195, 206, 221-223, 230.

⁸⁰ Cruikshank Dodd 1997-1998, 265-266; H  lou 2003b; Immerzeel 2004.

⁸¹ Kawerau 1955, 73; Leroy 1971, 244; Prawer 2001, 229.

⁸² Kawerau 1955, 73.

⁸³ Cruikshank Dodd 1997-1998, 267; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 354; Immerzeel 2004, Pl. 4.

⁸⁴ A second supplicant, represented on the opposite wall, was painted by the same artist; he has similar features and is probably the same person; Immerzeel 2004, Pl. 4.

⁸⁵ Prawer 1972, 157-158.

⁸⁶ For the genealogy of the Giblets, see Rey 1895.



Pl. 19. Saint Bacchus; Deir Mar Musa al-Habashi (© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)



Pl. 20. Saint Sergius; Deir Mar Musa al-Habashi (© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)

particular the Knights Templar, questions arise about its iconographic function in the relations between the Latins and native Christians.

Icons in the Monastery of Saint Catherine displaying equestrian saints with red-crossed banners are that of 'Georges de Paris' (Pl. 13) and the two pieces under discussion (nos 19b, 20; Pls 4, 5). In the latter two cases the banner is an attribute of Saint Sergius. Weitzmann regarded this detail as an argument to relate the icons to the Order of the Knights Templar and to attribute them to a South Italian master working in one of the crusader countries⁸⁷. The matter of their origin will be discussed below, but first our attention focuses on similar works of art in sanctuaries in Syria and Lebanon, unknown to Weitzmann.

To the example of the flag held by Saint Sergius in the Church of Mar Sarkis at Qara, mentioned in the introduction (Pl. 2), two others in the Qalamun can be added. In Deir Mar Musa al-Habashi, south-east of Qara, six equestrian saints are depicted in the upper zone of the nave of the chapel (nos 17a-f; Pls 11, 12, 19, 20). This cavalry belongs to the decorative programme of layer 3, executed in the 'Syrian' style by the painter Sarkis in 1208⁸⁸. Here again the red-crossed white banner is carried by the saintly namesake of the artist on the western part of the south wall, while at his opposite Saint Bacchus has a flag with these colours reversed (Pls 20, 19).

Hunt explains the occurrence of this typical crusader symbol in a region that was never annexed by the crusader states in the light of contacts between native Christians living on both sides of the border between the Country of Tripoli and the Emirate of Damascus, and accordingly suggested that the two icons in the Sinai were painted in the vicinity of Tripoli⁸⁹. Recent discoveries in Lebanon seem to confirm her hypothesis. Two mounted saints with red-crossed banners, probably Theodore and George, are depicted in the Church of Mar Girgis in Deddé near Tripoli (nos 2a/b; Pl. 21). Another rider with this attribute is present in the Church of Mar Saba in Eddé al-Batrun, near Batrun (no. 9b; Pl. 22), while in the Church of Mart Nohra and Mart Sophia at Dmalsa, between Bahdeidat and Batrun, faint traces of a horseman (Saint George?), probably carrying the banner as well, can be distinguished (no. 11; Fig. 5).

The presence of flags in Deir Mar Musa and Qara testifies to the integration of this element into

the art of local Christians, independently of Latin rulers. Accordingly, a conclusion in favour of any active Frankish involvement in the pictorial programmes in Deddé, Eddé al-Batrun and Dmalsa is premature, although not illogical. Nevertheless, an indirect influence of crusader traditions can be taken for granted. Knights carrying white flags with red crosses were a familiar sight in the Latin states, and were represented as such on lead seals of Frankish authorities from the first half of the twelfth century onwards⁹⁰. The step from such secular images to that of Saint George with a banner was a small one. Gustave Schlumberger's description of a reproduction of the seal of Bishop Roger of Ramla (Lydda) attached to a document from 1115 speaks for itself: "*Saint Georges à cheval, passant à gauche; il tient de la main gauche un écu allongé, orné d'une croix et présenté en face; de la droite une lance, ornée d'un gonfanon à deux queues, portant une croix.*"⁹¹ Apparently this was how the saint was seen through Western eyes. According to William of Malmesbury Saint George and Saint Demetrius intervened in the battle of Antioch "with flying banners" ("*vexillis levatis*")⁹². The chronicle of Raimund d'Agiles, who participated in the First Crusade, mentions the dream of a priest about Saint George explicitly revealing himself as the banner-carrier of the army⁹³. The saint was not only accepted as an associate in the holy war against Islam as early as the late eleventh century, he was also supposed to head the troops carrying the symbol of the cross. As a result of this perception, Saint George is depicted with the red-crossed banner until the present day.

⁸⁷ Weitzmann 1982, 354, 435.

⁸⁸ Cruikshank Dodd 1992, 170, Inscr. 16.

⁸⁹ Leroy 1974-1975, 96-99, Figs 1-3; Hunt 2000a, 79-80, 112; Figs 4-5.

⁹⁰ Schlumberger/Chalandon/Blanchet 1943; Joscelin I de Courtenay (1112-ca 1120): 56, no. 130; Pons, Count of Tripoli (1113-1126): 58-59, no. 136, Pl. XVIII (see also Nicolle 1988, no. 809); Hugues II de Puiset, Count of Jaffa (1126): 47-48, no. 112, Pl. XIX, 1; Guillaume de Galilée (1126): 56-57, no. 133, Pl. XIX, 4; Renaud de Sidon (1173-1198): 55, no. 129, Pl. XIX, 7.

⁹¹ Schlumberger/Chalandon/Blanchet 1943, 114; after a drawing in the register of Antonio Amico, Communal Library, Palermo, fol. 225.

⁹² See note 57.

⁹³ Raimund d'Agiles. *Histoire des francs qui ont pris Jérusalem*, trad. F.P.G. Guizot (Collection des mémoires relatifs à l'histoire de France depuis la fondation de la monarchie française jusqu'au 13e siècle), Paris 1824, 356.



Pl. 21. *Saint Theodore?*; Deddé, Church of Mar Mtianos
(© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)



Pl. 22. *Mounted saint*; Eddé al-Batrun, Church of Mar Saba
(© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)

So far, in the Middle East no wall paintings or icons of equestrian saints with banners have been dated earlier than those in Deir Mar Musa from 1208. It is also impossible to tell when the banner was introduced as an attribute of Saint Sergius, Saint Bacchus and Saint Theodore. Nevertheless, this theme is an excellent example of the interaction between native and Latin Christians. The Westerners borrowed the indigenous motif of the holy horseman, and in exchange, their oriental fellow believers, also those living within the predominantly Muslim society of the Emirate of Damascus, adopted the banner as a Christian symbol, or even “as a sign of militant Christianity in a hostile environment”⁹⁴, from the early thirteenth century at least.

At first sight, the tolerance of this obviously offensive symbol by the Muslim authorities is surprising, but this too can be explained. The murals in Deir Mar Musa, and very probably also those in Qara, were produced during Ayyubid rule (1174-1249), renowned for its open-minded attitude towards indigenous Christians and its politics of appeasement towards the Latin states. The first half



Fig. 5. *Mounted saint*; Dmalsa, Church of Mart Nohra and Mart Sophia

of the thirteenth century was characterised by peaceful coexistence, allowing free travel between the Latin and Muslim states. West Syrians and Melkites were not the only ones to profit from this occasion; Westerners crossed the borders as well, for instance, to visit the Monastery of Our Lady at Saydnaya in the Qalamun⁹⁵. It is, however, scarcely imaginable that they were allowed to travel around in full armour and with the crusader banner raised.

⁹⁴ Cruikshank Dodd 1992, 87; *idem*, 2001: 52; see also Westphalen 2000a, 496.

⁹⁵ Hamilton 2000; Immerzeel, *Prophet Elijah*.

Doula Mouriki refuted Weitzmann's hypothesis about the Western origin of the artists who painted the two icons in Saint Catherine's Monastery, emphasising their stylistic affinities with the wall paintings in the Church of Panagia at Moutoullas in Cyprus, dated 1280⁹⁶. With reference to Leroy's article about the paintings in Qara, she suggested that the painter was a Syrian trained on Cyprus⁹⁷. As a matter of fact, Cyprian influences have been recognised in several murals in Lebanon, for example in the Church of Mar Fouqa in Amiun (late twelfth to early thirteenth century)⁹⁸, while the iconography and style of the decoration in the Chapel of the Prophet Elijah at Ma'arrat Saydnaya near Damascus betray the hand of a Cypriot master (late twelfth century to ca 1260)⁹⁹. This connection with the island, under Latin occupation since 1191, has not yet been fully elaborated, but undoubtedly a future study on this subject will have much to add to the general picture.

Hunt, whose opinion about the 'Lebanese' origin of the icons was mentioned above, had the advantage of knowing the wall paintings in Lebanon as well as those in Qara, however she was not aware of the Lebanese banner carriers that are decisive in support of her hypothesis. Given the absence of similar equestrian saints on wall paintings and icons in Cyprus, her approach deserves serious consideration. On the contrary, Hunt's attribution of the icons to Syrian Orthodox artists is questionable; in a later publication she corrects her previous opinion by changing the denomination into Syrian Melkite¹⁰⁰.

These matters are discussed in H  lou's perceptive study from 2003 on another two-sided icon from the thirteenth century, preserved in the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Our Lady of Kaftun, situated in the mountains between Tripoli and Batrun¹⁰¹. During the Lebanese civil war this little-known piece was transferred to Paris and restored. Prior to its return to the monastery, it was exhibited in the Centre Culturel du Panth  on in 1996, and photographs of it were published for the first time by Antoine Lammens in the catalogue of this exhibition¹⁰².

On one side a Virgin *Hodegetria* is depicted between the busts of two angels, set against a golden background (Pl. 23). The Virgin has a dark-brown *maphorion*. The Child sits on her left knee and she

holds it with her left arm, while she raises her right hand in front of her body. Christ is turned towards his mother. He is dressed in a light-brown tunic and a dark-brown mantle. In his left hand, he holds a folded scroll, and with his right hand he makes the sign of blessing. The abbreviated name of the Virgin is written in Greek (MHP ΘΥ). The protruding border is decorated with a plaster ornament, which displays circular vine scroll patterns surrounding animals.

The subject on the reverse is the Baptism of Christ (Pl. 24). He stands naked in the Jordan, indicated with horizontal blue waves and flanked to both sides by a mountainous landscape against a dark blue background. John the Baptist is placed to the left. He has black hair and beard, wears a hairy dark-brown mantle, and baptises Christ with his right hand. A dove descends from a cloud at the top of the representation, indicated by thin white lines. To the right, six angels are turned towards Christ, the angel in the foreground being the only one who is rendered in full. He has a light-blue tunic, a red mantle covering his hands, and red shoes decorated with white dots. His clothes are highlighted and the design of folds displays an almost geometric pattern of parallel lines and semicircular shapes. In the top left corner King David, is turned towards the centre of the composition, holding an opened scroll with Psalms 114 and 77 written in Arabic. The Prophet Isaiah, rendered at his opposite, has a similar scroll, but here the text is in Syriac (Isaiah 1,16; 12,3). In contrast, Greek is used for the names of Saint John the Baptist, David and Isaiah, as well as for the title of the scene (Η ΒΑΠΤΑΣΙΣ). Differences in execution led Lammens to attribute the Virgin to an eleventh-century artist and the Baptism to a painter from the thirteenth century, but H  lou replied that formal differences are not uncommon in double-sided icons. She noted sufficient stylistic similarities, e.g. in the rendering of the round heads of the angels and the use of colours

⁹⁶ Mouriki 1984; Stylianou/Stylianou 1985, 292-320.

⁹⁷ Mouriki 1995, 400-403.

⁹⁸ Cruikshank Dodd 1997-1998, 257-264.

⁹⁹ Immerzeel, *Prophet Elijah*.

¹⁰⁰ Hunt 2000b, 18.

¹⁰¹ H  lou 2003a, Figs 1, 2; see also H  lou 1999, 20, Pl. 16.

¹⁰² Lammens 1996, 21-27; see also Immerzeel 2003, Pls 4, 5; *idem* 2004, Pl. 13.



Pl. 23. Icon: *Virgin Hodegetria*; Monastery of Kaftun
(Lammens 1996, Pl. on 21)



Pl. 24. Reverse: *Baptism*; Monastery of Kaftun
(Lammens 1996, Pl on 27)

for the angels' dress on both sides, to ascertain that one artist painted both sides¹⁰³.

The affinities of this icon with the double-sided piece in Saint Catherine's Monastery are apparent from several elements. In details, the Virgin *Hodegetria* on the icon in the Sinai is identical to the image in Kaftun, although her head is slightly bent, while the angels are absent (no. 20a; Pl. 3). The icons are also both relatively large in size¹⁰⁴. Stylistic analogies can be found in the rounded heads with the carefully shaped though rather linear and slightly curved eyelids and eyebrows, straight noses with a slightly curved top, and delicate small mouths in red. The use of colour is the

same in both; dark brown dominates on the side showing the Virgin, while the reverses excel in the use of fresh red. The rendering of the faces is puppet-like, with a delicate use of red on the cheeks. A difference is, however, the use of green to shadow the horsemen's faces, while the faces on the icon in Kaftun are more reddish. It can be concluded that both icons were painted in the tradition of one atelier and in roughly the same period, although, considering the typical pattern and highlighting in the dress of the angel in the Baptism scene, which is lacking on the other piece, very probably not by the same master.

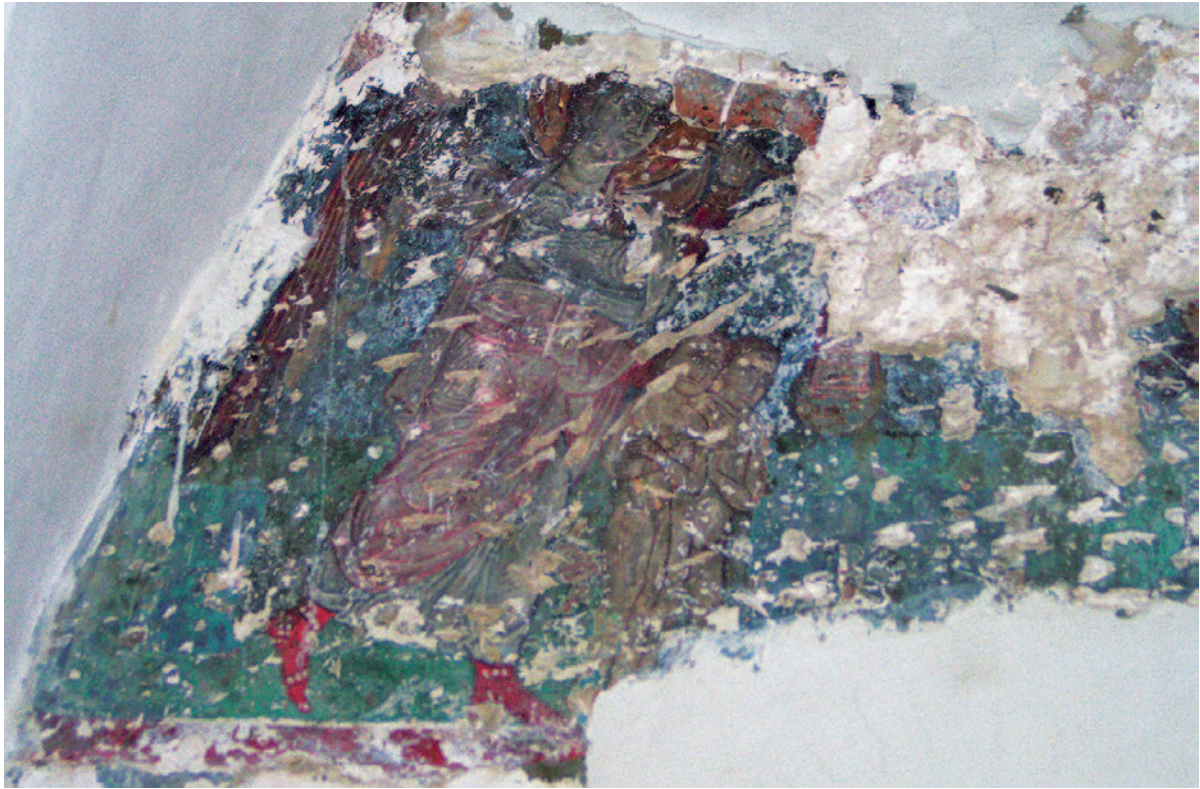
Concerning the location where the icons were painted, it must be admitted that several aspects are characteristic for Cypriot art, such as the plaster reliefs on the border of the icon in Kaftun¹⁰⁵ and the particular iconographic model of the Virgin holding the Child on one knee. From a stylistic and iconographic point of view, the enthroned Virgin *Hodegetria* in a mural in the Church of Panagia tou Moutoullas from 1280 is highly comparable to the images on the two double-sided icons¹⁰⁶. A striking

¹⁰³ H  lou 2003a, 121.

¹⁰⁴ Kaftun: 111x 80 cm; Sinai: 95 x 62 cm.

¹⁰⁵ Mouriki 1995, 387-388; Hunt 2000a, 80; H  lou 2003a, 117.

¹⁰⁶ Mouriki 1984, 174, 191, Fig. 10; *idem* 1995, 403, Fig. 65; see also the contribution the article about the flabellum from Deir al-Surian by Snelders, Van Rompay and Immerzeel in the present volume.



Pl. 25. Angel; Deir Hammatur
(© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)

detail connecting this painting to greater Syria is the arcade below which the Virgin is placed. It consists of a rectangular interlace pattern with alternating coloured jewel-like fillings. This motif is derived from Seljuk art and features often in Lebanon and Syria, e.g. in Bahdeidat and Qara¹⁰⁷. It accentuates the close artistic interaction between Cyprus and the County of Tripoli and demonstrates that the suggestion that the icons were produced on the mainland should not be rejected out of hand on the basis of the Virgin's Cypriot appearance and the plaster ornaments alone.

In all probability, the icon of Kaftun is still in its original environment. Evidence for its local production is the use of Arabic, Syriac and Greek in the inscriptions: the *lingua franca* of all natives, the official language of the West Syrian, Melkite and Maronite Churches, and the language of the Byzantine Orthodox Church, respectively. Since the denomination of the Monastery of Kaftun is Greek Orthodox, like that of other monastic complexes and churches in the same area (e.g. Amiun, Qusba and Rashkida), the icon was made for Melkite use.

Further evidence follows from comparisons with different wall paintings. Hérou pointed to the stylistic similarities of the Baptism scene with that in the Cave Church of Saydet Durr at Hadchit near the Qadisha Valley (Fig. 1)¹⁰⁸. Even more striking are the resemblances of the angel next to Christ with another angel in a partially destroyed Last Judgement scene in Deir Hammatur near Qusba (Pl. 25)¹⁰⁹. The only differences are the mirrored position of this angel and the use of violet instead of red for his mantle. In their attitude and the details of their dress, in particular the fairly geometric, parallel linear patterns of the folds and the highlighting, the two angels appear to be twins. Cogently, the icon was produced by a workshop that was also specialised in mural painting.

¹⁰⁷ Immerzeel 2004.

¹⁰⁸ Hérou 2003a, 124, Fig. 10; also published in: Tallon 1962, 286-287, Pl. I; Sader 1997, Figs 153, 158; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 287, 384.

¹⁰⁹ Nordiguian 1998, 80-81, Pl. VIII; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 232, 387-389; Immerzeel 2004, Pl. 13.



Pl. 26. *Salome; Bsarma, Church of Saydet al-Haqle*
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With this coherence in craftsmanship in mind, we now return to the two icons in Saint Catherine's Monastery. Obvious iconographic analogies are present in Lebanon, Qara and Deir Mar Musa, while their supposedly Melkite background is justified by the Greek inscriptions on the double-sided icon and its connection to the icon of Kaftun. For Qara, Andrea Schmidt demonstrates that this village too was Melkite until it was depopulated by the troops of Baybars in 1266¹¹⁰. In comparing Qara's murals to the icons, stylistic resemblances can be added to the similar iconographic elements. This argument cannot be used in comparing the icons depicting horsemen in Lebanese sanctuaries, as the



Pl. 27. *Horses of the Magi; Bsarma, Church of Saydet al-Haqle* (© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)

poor state of these paintings do not permit a proper formal analysis. Yet similar craftsmanship is present in some other murals with a different iconography.

A partially preserved Nativity scene in the surviving medieval part of the Church of Saydet al-Haqle at Bsarma, between Tripoli, Amiun and Qusba, can also be related to the icons¹¹¹. Discernable are the stone construction on which the Child is put, the First Bath of Jesus, and the three horses of the Magi. The only head visible is that of the midwife Salome, who pours water into the Child's bath (Pl. 26). It displays the same linear characteristics as the heads of Saint Sergius and Saint Bacchus on the larger icon, including the round face, the large, finely drawn rounded eyes, and the slightly curved nose (Pl. 4). Other striking details are the flatly rendered bodies and strong outlines of the horses, comparable to those of the mounts on the icons (Pl. 27). Their heads are now hidden from view by a modern construction, but were very probably rendered in profile, which is also the case in several other sanctuaries in the region, in particular the village of Qalamun, Deir Hammatur, and Rashkida (nos 1, 5, and 6). In particular the formal relationship between the horse's heads on the icons and the one in Rashkida is striking.

In conclusion, several arguments lead us to believe that the two icons in the Sinai were painted in the Byzantine Orthodox area near Tripoli. Future research on other fragments in Rashkida and Kaftun, where in 2003 fragments of wall paintings were brought to light in the medieval complex¹¹², may reveal additional arguments.

¹¹⁰ Schmidt/Westphalen, *Mar Yakub*.

¹¹¹ Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 284, 374; Immerzeel 2004, no. 6.

¹¹² Immerzeel 2004, no. 14.

A final matter is the chronology of the three icons. All authors who have treated the pieces in the Sinai agree in a dating in the second half of the thirteenth century, but in view of the serious indications for their Lebanese origin and the historical events in this period in Syria the chronology may be related to those of the wall paintings (see above). The *terminus ante quem* for the decoration in the Church of Mar Sarkis in Qara is 1266¹¹³, and Hunt convincingly dates the icon of Saint Sergius in the Sinai between the early 1240s and 1270s¹¹⁴. This estimation is also acceptable for both double-sided pieces; it coincides with the suggested dating of the murals in Bahdeidat and Eddé al-Batrun, and perhaps also in other sanctuaries in the area. Apparently, in this period the artistic renaissance of the Christian Levant had reached its peak, shortly before its deathblow from the Mamluk conquest.

CONCLUSIONS

In addition to the many mounted saints known from oriental Christian art, the substantial number of such images in churches in the County of Tripoli and the Qalamun illustrates their popularity in these areas as well. The mounted saints in Deir Mar Musa from 1058-1088 testify to the existence of this theme in the artistic repertoire of indigenous Christians prior to the founding of the crusader states. It stood in a long oriental tradition rooted in the pre-Islamic period, witnesses of which have been found in Egypt, Cappadocia and, to a lesser extent, in Syria.

The influx of Westerners from the late eleventh century onwards enlarged the circle of venerators of saints such as George, Theodore, Sergius and Bacchus. Especially the first of this list, who was the Byzantine patron of soldiers, enjoyed much attention from the crusaders. The mounted Saint George was introduced into their iconographic repertoire as early as the second decade of the twelfth century. Most of the horsemen found in Lebanon and Syria were painted during the heyday of church decoration in the thirteenth century, before the rise of Mamluk power from 1260 onwards. They display a remarkable iconographic coherence; some of them even portray the crusader symbol of the banner with the cross. The works of art from this period also include icons, painted by native Christians. In addition, evidence for Western

sponsorship of the decoration in the Church of Mar Tadros at Bahdeidat illustrates the remarkable osmosis in the relations between indigenous and Latin Christians, with the warrior saints George and Theodore as focal points.

CATALOGUE

A. LEBANON

1. *Qalamun*, Cave Church of Mart Marina.

The upper part of Saint Demetrius, the head of his brown horse and his name in Greek are visible through a later layer of paintings, consisting of scenes from the life of Saint Marina.

Date: 12th/13th century.

Bibliography: De Brossé 1926; Lauffray 1946-1948, 14; Sader 1997, 156-164, Pls 116-118, Fig. 123; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 336-338, 404; Badwi 2000, no. 15; Immerzeel 2000, no. 11; *idem* 2004, no. 1; Balicka-Witakowski et al., 2001, 226.

2. *Deddé*, Church of Mar Mtanios (Saint Anthony).

West wall: traces of two equestrian saints, turned towards each other (2a/b). Both are crowned, are dressed with a coat of mail, carry a shield, and have a red-crossed white banner attached to their lances. The left one seems to have a pointed black beard and a red *chlamys*, and rides a brown horse (Pl. 21). Therefore he may be identified as Saint Theodore, and the saint at his opposite as Saint George. North wall: fragments of a third horseman riding to the East (2c). All are in a poor state.

Date: 13th century.

Bibliography: Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 277, 278, 376-377; Immerzeel 2004, no. 2.

3. *Enfê*, Church of Saydet al-Rih.

South wall: fragments of an equestrian saint, possibly Saint Theodore, and the head of his red-brown horse, as well as a woman to the right (3; Pl. 28). She brings in mind the widow standing in front of Saint Theodore's horse in Deir Anba Antonius near the Red Sea (1232-1233)¹¹⁵.

¹¹³ Schmidt/Westphalen, *Mar Yakub*.

¹¹⁴ Hunt 2000a, 112.

¹¹⁵ Van Moorsel, 1995, 157-160; 1997, Pls 93-94; Bolman 2002, 77-78, 116-117, Pls 5.2/3, 7.15, 7.25.



Pl. 28. *Saint Theodore?*; *Enfê*, Church of Saydet al-Rih (© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)

Date: 12th/13th century.

Bibliography: Sader 1997, 143-144, Pl. 115; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 381-382; Immerzeel 2000, no. 16; *idem* 2004, no. 4.

4. *Hamat*, ruined Church of Mar Girios, or Girgis (Saint George).

On the remaining south wall: very faint traces of two equestrian saints, one of them mounted on a white horse (4a/b).

Date: 13th century?

Bibliography: Tallon 1962, 293; Sader 1997, 141, Pl. 112; Immerzeel 2000, no. 17; *idem* 2004, no. 12.

5. *Qusba*, chapel of Deir Saydet Hammatur.

Above the western entrance: fragments of an equestrian saint on a white horse, killing a soldier (Saint George?). To the right of the horse a building is represented.

Date: 13th century.

Bibliography: Nordiguian 1998, 82, Fig. 12; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 387-388; Immerzeel

2000, no. 12; *idem* 2004, no. 11.

6. *Rashkida*, Church of Mar Girios, or Girgis (Saint George).

Traces of a horseman with red *chlamys*, mounted on an white horse (Saint George?).

Date: 13th century.

Bibliography: Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 281, 406-407; Immerzeel 2004, no. 13.

7. *Becharreh/Hadchit*, Cave Church of Saydet Durr. North wall: traces of an equestrian saint with a shield, turned to the right.

Date: 13th century.

Bibliography: Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 280, 394; Immerzeel 2000, no. 8; *idem* 2004, no. 17.

8. *Qadisha Valley/Hasrun*, Cave of Mar Assia.

Primitive drawings in red of two horsemen.

Date uncertain.

Bibliography: Sader 1997, 236-238, Pl. 185; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 390; Immerzeel 2000,

no. 20.

9. *Eddé al-Batrun*, Church of Mar Saba.

North wall: fragments of a white horse with a pillion rider wearing red clothes, a red *chlamys*, and a sea with fish (Saint George rescuing the boy of Mitilene; 9a; Pls 6, 7). South wall: fragments of two equestrian saints riding to the left. The easternmost horseman has a red *chlamys* and is mounted on a brown horse. A fragment of a white banner with red cross is visible to the top right (9b; Pl. 22). In the centre of the wall is the head of a white horse, above which a hand reaches out of heaven, and a partly preserved Greek inscription (ΑΓΙΟΣ; 9c; Pl. 8). On the north arcade remain traces of an animal with an ochre colour and mane, and the head and shoulders of a supplicant (Saint Mammas mounted on a lion; 9d; Pl. 9).

Date: ca 1264? (Hélou 2003b).

Bibliography: Sader 1997, 120-125, Pls 92, 103; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 275, 276, 80-381; Hélou 2003b, Fig. 22; Immerzeel 2000, no. 5; *idem* 2004, no. 20, Pl. 11; Balicka-Witakowski et al. 2001, 224.

10. *Kfar Schleiman*, Cave Church of Saydet-Naia.

West wall: fragments of an equestrian saint on a white horse, holding a round shield.

Date: 13th century.

Bibliography: Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 392-393; Immerzeel 2000, no. 9; *idem* 2004, no. 21.

11. *Dmalsa*, Church of Mart Nohra and Mart Sophia.

North wall: very faint traces of an equestrian saint with a red *chlamys*, turned to the right and holding a lance in his raised right hand (Fig. 5). Below his neck a smaller person seems to be depicted. To the right remain traces resembling a white flag with a red cross (Saint George rescuing the boy of Mitilene?).

Date: 13th century?

Unpublished. For this church see: Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 377.

12. *Bahdeidat*, Church of Mar Tadros (Saint Theodore).

North wall: Saint Theodore is represented riding to the right on a red-brown horse (12a, Pls 14, 15). The left part of the painting is lost because of the construction of a window at a later moment. The saint has short dark hair and pointed beard, and is dressed with a hauberk and a dark-brown *chlamys*.

With his left hand he holds the reins of the horse, in his raised right hand a lance with which he pierces a snakelike dragon below the horse. A delicately decorated shield is visible between his body and the head of the horse. The saint's name is mentioned in an Estrangelo inscription. To the right a male supplicant kneels in front of the horse. He has short dark hair and beard, and his head is covered with a round light-grey helmet. The supplicant is dressed with a hauberk covering his arms and legs, over which a long tunic of a light colour is worn. Under his left arm he holds a red stick, probably topped with a cross.

South wall: Saint George is represented riding to the left on a white horse (12b, Pls 16-18). He has short dark hair on which a crown is put, and is dressed with a red-brown tunic, a yellow hauberk and a red *chlamys*. In his right hand Saint George holds a lance. To the left a round shield with a red and white chessboard pattern is visible. With his left arm he clasps a small pillion rider, who holds a cup and ewer, and is dressed with red garments. Below the horse a small beardless person with short, dark hair is depicted standing frontally, raising his hands in prayer in front of his chest. He is dressed with a so-called *mi-parti* tunic, consisting of a red and a blue half. His eyes have been damaged intentionally. This supplicant stands in front of a dark-blue sea teeming with fish. To his left a partly preserved red shield or boot is visible on the flank of the horse, on which a light-red eagle can be discerned. Represented is the Rescuing of the boy of Mitilene. In both cases, the background consists of a dark-blue sky and a brown hilly landscape; both saints have a yellow halo outlined with a white and black border.

Date: ca 1250-1270?

Bibliography: Folda 1995, 403; Tallon 1996; Sader 1997, 73-75, Pls 41-43, 67, 69; Cruikshank Dodd 1997-1998, 264-266; *idem* 2001, *passim*, Pls. 83, 96; Hélou 1998, *idem* 1999, 16-17, Pls 1-6; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 266, 267, 271-274, 279; Badwi 2000, 65; Hunt 2000a, 112; Immerzeel 2000, no. 1; *idem* 2003; *idem* 2004, no. 24, Pls 6-10; Westphalen 2000, 489-491, Abb. 2-6; Balicka-Witakowski et al. 2001, 223.

13. *Blât*, Church of Mar Elias.

South wall: fragments of an equestrian saint riding to the left on a brown horse, holding a round shield



Pl. 29. Mounted saint; Blat, Church of Mar Elias
(© M. Immerzeel/Paul van Moorsel Centre)

(Pl. 29). He has brown hair ending in curls (Saint Sergius?).

Date: 13th century.

Bibliography: Sader 1997, 57-58, Pl. 19; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 280, 373; Immerzeel 2000, no. 19; *idem* 2004, no. 26.

B. SYRIA

14. *Crac des Chevaliers*, extramural 'baptismal' chapel, north wall.

Fragment showing the belly of a white horse, below which is a sea with fish (Saint George rescuing the boy of Mitilene).

Date: ca 1170-1200?

Bibliography: Folda 1982, 192, 194-195, Fig. 22; *idem* 1995, 402-403, Pl. 9.37m; Cruikshank Dodd 1992, 74, *idem* 2001, 50; Hunt 2000a, 109, 111, Fig. 16; Grotowski 2002, Fig. 5; Balicka-Witakowski et al. 2001, 221.

15. *Qara*, Church of Mar Sarkis (Saint Sergius). North wall: Saint Theodore and Saint Sergius flanking the Virgin *Galactothrophousa* (15a/b). Saint Theodore's name is written in Greek (Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΘΕΩΔΩΡΟΣ; left) and in Estrangelo (right; Qadisho Mari Tawodros; 'Holy Saint Theodore'). He rides to the right on a red-brown horse, of

which only the head and neck remain, and holds the reins in his left hand (Pl. 1). His right arm is raised, but the hand is lost. Saint Theodore has dark-brown hair, on which a crown decorated with white stones is placed. His face is damaged. The saint is dressed with a red tunic, a yellow hauberk and a brown *chlamys* decorated with a darker square pattern with white dots. To the right a shield appears from behind his back. It has a wide yellow border decorated with square patterns, in which green, red and white precious stones are set. The outer border of the shield has a dotted decoration in white. The inside is white; its decoration consists of a black square pattern with red and green motifs. To the top right a hand making a sign of blessing appears from heaven, indicated as a curved white border with a star.

Although Saint Sergius must have been represented on horseback as well, nothing remains of his mount (Pl. 2). He is turned to the left. The saint's face, shoulders and right half of his body are lost. His crown and dress are similar to those of Saint Theodore, while his tunic and *chlamys* are red. In his left hand he carries a lance with a red-crossed white banner. To the top right his name is written in Greek (Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ [abbr.] СЕРΓΙΗΟС).

Date: ca 1200-1266.

Bibliography: Leroy 1974-1975, 96-99, 104, Figs 1-3; Cruikshank Dodd 1992, 116, 118, Pl. 64; *idem* 2001, 110-111, Pl. 89; Mouriki 1995, 401 note 190; Zibawi 1996, Pl. 18; Velmans 1999, 63, Fig. 56; Hunt 2000a, 109-111, Figs 4, 5; Immerzeel 2003, Pls 1, 2; Westphalen 2000a, 496, Abb. 26; *idem* 2000b, 395-396, Abb. 4, 5; Balicka-Witakowski et al. 2001, 217-218; Schmidt/Westphalen, *Mar Yakub*.

16. *Qara*, chapel of Deir Mar Yaquub.

South wall: fragment of a horseman.

Date: ca 1200-1266.

Bibliography: Schmidt/Westphalen, *Mar Yakub*.

17. *Nekk*, chapel of Deir Mar Musa al-Habashi. Upper zone of the nave: six equestrian saints, all turned to the East (layer 3).

South wall, f.l.t.r.: 17a: fragments of a brown horse and brown *chlamys*. 17b: fragments of a white horse, red *chlamys*, a sea with fish, and a brown landscape (Saint George rescuing the boy from Mitilene; Pl. 11). 17c: Saint Bacchus on a light-brown horse, holding a lance with a red banner dec-

orated with a white cross, and a round shield; brown landscape (Pl. 19).

North wall, f.l.t.r.: 17d. Saint Sergius on a white horse, holding a lance with a white banner decorated with a red cross, and a round shield; light-brown landscape (Pl. 20). 17e: fragments of a brown horse and a snake (Saint Theodore; Pl. 12). 17f: partially preserved unidentified saint on a white galloping horse, with a red *chlamys*; brown landscape.

Traces of layer 1: remains that are visible through gaps on the belly of Saint George's horse on layer 3 are a raised hand holding a lance, part of a halo and the letters [ΑΓ]OC ΓΕ[ΟΡΓΙOC] (17b1; Pl. 16). At his opposite remain part of a halo and the name of Saint Theodore in Greek (Α[Γ]ΙΟΣ [ΘΕ]ΟΔ[ΟΡOC]) visible through gaps in the image of this saint on layer 3 (17b1; Pl. 19). A face, with a white halo and part of a blue background, is visible as well, but it belongs to layer 2.

Date: layer 1: 1058-1088; layer 2: 1095; layer 3: 1192-1193 (according to Cruikshank Dodd) or 1208 (according to Dall'Oglio).

Bibliography: Cruikshank Dodd 1992, 84-89, Pls 15, 28; *idem* 2001, 50-56, 133-134, Pls IX, X, 27-33; Folda 1995, 403; Dall'Oglio et al. 1998, 15, 145-146, Foto 37; Hunt 2000a, Figs 13, 14; Immerzeel 2003, Pl. 3; Balicka-Witakowska et al. 2001, 218-220.

C. PALESTINE

18. *Abu Gosh*, Church of the Hospital of Saint John.

North wall: fragments of a saint on a white horse (Saint George?; 18a). Traces of another horseman on the opposite wall, reported by A. de Piellat in 1901, have disappeared since then (18b).

Date: ca 1170.

Bibliography: Kühnel 1988, 171-173, Pls LIX/105, 106, LX/107; Folda 1995, 389; Cruikshank Dodd 2001, 50.

D. ICONS (MONASTERY OF SAINT CATHERINE)

19. Virgin *Hodegetria*; Saint Sergius and Saint Bacchus (Pls 3, 4).

The Virgin has a dark-brown *maphorion* and holds the Child in her left arm, while she raises her right hand in front of her body. Christ sits on the Virgin's

left knee and is turned towards his mother. He is dressed in a light-brown tunic and a dark-brown mantle. In his left hand he holds a folded scroll, and with his right hand he makes the sign of blessing. The reverse shows Saints Sergius and Bacchus on horseback, riding to the right. The background is light-brown at the top and dark-brown at the bottom. Saint Sergius is placed on the foreground. He has dark-brown curly hair with a crown, beaded with pearls and red and green precious stones. He wears a hauberk over a black tunic and red breeches, a *maniakion*, and a red *chlamys*. In his left hand he holds the reins of the ochre horse, in his right a lance to which a white banner decorated with a red cross is fixed. His additional armour consists of a bow and quiver. The dress of Saint Bacchus is similar, although the colours are reversed. He holds a lance without banner. Their Greek names are written in red.

Date: ca 1240-1270.

Bibliography: Soteriou/Soteriou, 1956/1958, I: Figs 185-186, II: 170-171; Weitzmann 1966, 71-72, Fig. 49; *idem* 1982, 345-346; 354, 435; *idem* 1984, 148-149, Figs 3, 4; Leroy 1974-1975, 104; Mouriki 1990, 102-124, esp. 119, Fig. 66; *idem* 1995, 399-403, Figs 63, 64; Cruikshank Dodd 1992, 116; *idem* 2001, 116; Hunt 2000a, 79, 110-111, Figs 2, 3; Piatnitsky 2000, 157, 252-253; Velmans 2000, 164; Hérou 2003a, 119-120, Figs 6, 7; Immerzeel 2003, Pl. 6; *idem* 2004; J. Folda, in: Evans 2004, no 229.

20. Saint Sergius (Pl. 5).

Saints Sergius is mounted on a light-brown horse riding to the right, against a background which is light-brown at the top and dark-brown at the bottom. He has dark-brown curly hair with a beaded crown, and wears a sleeveless hauberk over a black tunic and red breeches, and a red *chlamys* decorated with white dots. In his left hand he holds the reins of the horse, in his right a lance to which a white banner decorated with a red cross is fixed. His additional armour consists of a bow, a quiver, and a round shield with a decorated border and a red cross. A female suppliant with a dark-blue tunic and black veil kneels in front of the saint and touches his right foot with her hands. The protruding border of the icon is decorated with a vine motif.

Date: ca 1240-1270.

Bibliography: Soteriou/Soteriou 1956/1958, I: Fig. 187, II: 171; Weitzmann 1966, 71-72, Fig. 49;

idem 1982, 345-346, 435; *idem* 1984, 232; Folda 1982, 245-247; Cormack/Mihalarias 1984, 133, Fig. 3; Mouriki 1984, 207, Fig. 33; *idem* 1995, 399-403, Fig. 62; Nicolle 1988, no. 843; Hunt 2000a, 78ff, Fig. 1; *idem* 2003b, 18; Velmans 2000, 162-163; Hérou 2003, 120; Skalova/Gabra 2003, 251; J. Folda, in: Evans 2004, no. 230.

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A Newly Discovered Mural Painting in Deir al-Surian

Karel C. INNEMÉE

Since 1996 an international team of conservators and researchers under the auspices of Leiden University have been working on the uncovering and conservation of paintings in the Church of the Holy Virgin of Deir al-Surian in the Wadi al-Natrun (Egypt). This project has resulted in the discovery of four successive layers of painting under the layer of eighteenth-century plaster-work that covered the interior of the church until recently¹. A number of the paintings that have been discovered show iconographical details that are unusual or even unique in Christian art until now.

In the autumn of 2002 a painting was discovered on the eastern wall of the northern *khurus* that has a quite simple but nevertheless intriguing composition (Pl. 2). This article will attempt to explain its iconography and the circumstances under which it was created.

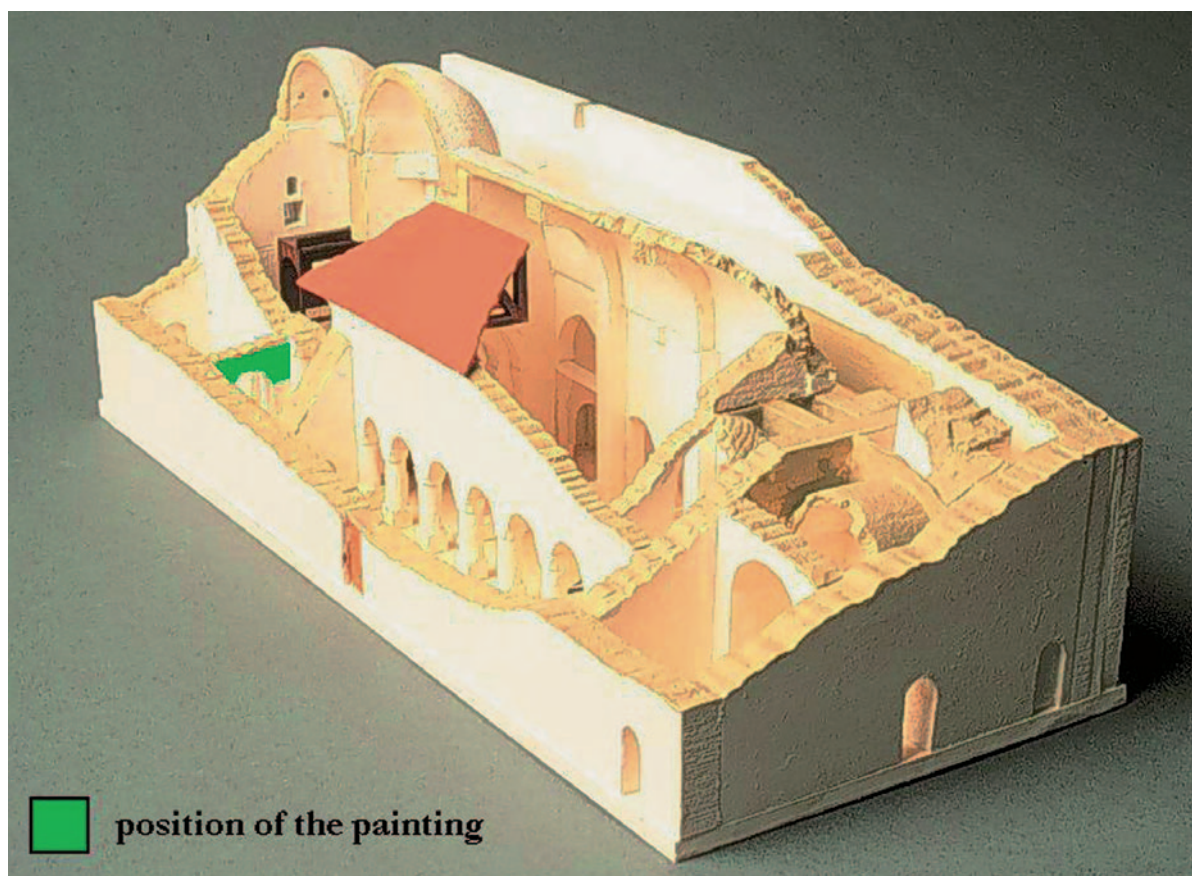
ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT OF THE PAINTING

The painting is located over an arched doorway leading into the northern sanctuary of the church (Pl. 1). Nowadays the altar in this sanctuary is dedicated to St Victor. At the time of the construction of the church, however, around A.D. 645, the area must have served as a *pastoforion* (side-room). A low, rectangular entrance in the far left-hand corner of the *khurus* led into this *pastoforion*. At a certain point, the shape and position of this doorway were modified. The doorway was moved to the right, so that from then on it was located symmetrically in the middle of the western wall of the *pastoforion*. The original low, rectangular shape was transformed into an arch almost 2.5 metres high. It seems that a door-frame of polychrome wood was placed at the inside of this arch. A small fragment of such a door-frame was found, seemingly still *in situ*, at the left side of the arch. The question arises of why and when this modification was carried out. The moment at which the change was made can be

estimated on the basis of the sequence of layers of painting on the wall surrounding the doorway. Layer 1 must have been painted soon after the building was completed and consisted of simple, mainly geometrical, decoration in red and yellow ochre. A few decades later, possibly around A.D. 700, the first monumental paintings of layer 2 must have been applied. There are indications that the paintings of layer 2 were not executed within a short period of time: several hands can be distinguished in the paintings, for example one of the first elements of the decoration in layer 2 is the dado that covered the walls of the church up to a height of approximately 2 metres. After that, the figurative paintings were added overhead. In the case of the wall around the entrance to the northern *pastoforion* we can see that the dado antedates the remodelling of the doorway and that the painting over it was added afterwards, probably shortly afterwards and possibly even as part of the alteration.

This is evident from the sequence of events: the arch was cut into the existing masonry, the painting was made around the arch and then the wooden door-frame was fitted inside the arch. In order to fix this frame, plaster was used that overlapped the lower edge of the painting. The overlapping plaster was then painted again. This gives the impression that the remodelling of the doorway and the painting of a new representation around it were carried out at the same time. This must have occurred after A.D. 700. The question remains how much later and why.

¹ Annual reports of the project can be found on the website of the on-line periodical *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* (<http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye>): Innemée 1999a; Innemée/Van Rompay/Sobczynski 1999b; Innemée/Van Rompay 2000; Innemée 2001; Innemée/Van Rompay 2002.



Pl. 1. Position of the painting in the church

ICONOGRAPHY OF THE PAINTING

The composition of the painting is rather simple: over the arch, one sees a *crux gemmata* against a dark blue background, surrounded by a black circle on which red stars are visible (Pl. 2). This is surrounded by a white circle with irregular red outcrops, giving the impression of a circle of fire. On either sides of the cross a man is standing with outstretched hands, dressed in the classical tunic and pallium. The man on the left has a red tunic and a blue pallium, the man on the right the opposite colours. Despite the rather poor state of preservation, the left-hand figure is clearly identifiable, due to the accompanying Coptic inscription. It reads . . . ϮΙΟϢ ΙΑΚΩΒΟϢ ΠΡΟϢ ΜΠΟϢ (Saint James, brother of the Lord). The right-hand figure is considerably more damaged and cannot be identified. The gesture of both men, the arms outstretched with the palms of the hands opened in the direction of the cross is clearly meant as expression of veneration.

This composition gives rise to a number of questions. In the first place, there is the question of the exact meaning of the cross. The next problem is the identification of the second person. A third question might be why exactly St James has been depicted. He is not the most prominent of the apostles, and it would be less surprising to find, for instance, St Paul and St Peter in a composition of this kind. The latter question may be the least difficult to answer. The architectural context of the painting can be considered the key to this. We have seen that the entrance to the northern *pastoforion* was enlarged after 700 and that this may be related to a change in its function. If its function was changed, it can only have been that the room was turned into a sanctuary. A possible reason for creating a second sanctuary in the church may have been the arrival of a group of monks that required its own chapel. In the course of the research project into the paintings of Deir al-Surian, it has become increasingly clear that the first Syrian



Pl. 2. St James and an unidentified person venerating a cross in a circle

monks arrived in the early ninth century. The previously accepted idea that the monastery was bought by the Takritan community between A.D. 710 and 720 seems no longer tenable and we should think rather of a period of co-existence of Coptic and Syrian monks in the monastery². If a separate sanctuary was created for the first group of Syrians that arrived in the monastery, the prominent presence of St James the Minor in a painting marking the entrance to this chapel would make sense, since he is considered to be the author of the liturgy used in the Syrian Orthodox Church.

The identification of the second person and the exact meaning of the cross are questions that are related and can only be answered after an iconological analysis of the scene. The cross is set against a blue background and surrounded by a circle of stars and flames, suggesting that it is appearing in the sky. This type of cross can be associated with the Sign of the Son of man, announcing the second coming of Christ, as mentioned in Matthew 24,

30³. We find a number of such representations in early Christian and early Byzantine art, one of the most remarkable of which is the cross in the apse mosaic in San Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna (sixth century; Pls 3, 4). In this complicated composition, we find a combination of two themes: 'Sign of the Son of man' appearing in heaven, and the Transfiguration. The three apostles witnessing the event are represented symbolically as sheep, while Moses and Elijah occur as half-figures appearing from clouds, each stretching out one hand in the direction of the cross. According to E. Dinkler, the source of inspiration for combining these two themes may have been the apocryphal Apocalypse of Peter, known in a Greek text from Akhmim and an Ethiopian translation⁴. In this text Christ speaks

² Innemée/Van Rompay 1998.

³ Dinkler/Dinkler-Von Schubert 1970.

⁴ Dinkler 1964, 90; Hennecke/Schneemelcher 1971, II, 472.



Pl. 3. *The Transfiguration, apse mosaic in San Apollinare in Classe, sixth century*

about the second coming during his Transfiguration. This means that the cross is used here not only as a symbol of Christ, but also at the same time as a representation of Christ in his glorified form.

The composition in Deir al-Surian is far less complex, but is in a number of respects comparable to the central part of the apse mosaic in Ravenna. In both cases there is a cross in a circle, flanked by two persons with hands raised in adoration. This could mean that here too Christ in his glorified body appears to two apostles, of whom St James is one. No such episode occurs in any of the canonical books of the bible, but the *Apocryphon of James* does contain passages that could have served as a source of inspiration for this mural painting⁵.

In the *Apocryphon of James*, when Christ appears to his apostles after the resurrection, James and Peter are selected to be taken to heaven in an

ecstatic vision. During this heavenly journey they are instructed by Christ concerning a number of topics, after which he is taken away from them in a 'chariot of spirit', an event that is described as though it refers to the Ascension. After Christ's departure, James and Peter return to the other apostles and James sends them out to several places, while he himself goes to Jerusalem. Apart from the fact that the cross is mentioned by Christ as an instrument of salvation⁶, an important reason for depicting Christ here in the shape of a cross may be that, as in the case of the Transfiguration, Christ appears to his apostles in his glorified form and not as a mortal human being. The apocalyptic nature of Christ's appearance may have been the most important reason to depict Christ in this shape here. If we are to presume a connection between the mural painting in Deir al-Surian and the text of the *Apocryphon of James*, this means that the text must have been known in the monastery at the time the painting was made, most probably the second half of the eighth, or the early ninth century. The only

⁵ Williams/Mueller 1977.

⁶ *Apocryphon of James* I, 6, Williams/Mueller 1977, 31.



Pl. 4. Detail of Pl. 3

version of the text that has survived is the Coptic text from the Nag Hammadi library, and there is no evidence that the library of Deir al-Surian possessed such a text. However, the fact that the *Apocryphon of James* was among the Nag Hammadi texts does not necessarily imply that its contents are of a Gnostic nature. Apart from a certain stress on the importance of knowledge the text does not contain allusions to specific ideas that are incompatible with orthodoxy. In this respect, the possibility should not be excluded that such a text might have been present in the library of the monastery. Apocryphal texts continued to be a source for themes of paintings, long after the biblical canon had been established. It has been seen that other paintings in the church were inspired by apocryphal texts, such as the scene of Andrew preaching to the dog-headed cannibals⁷. In the case of the scene of the Dormition of the Virgin, higher up on the eastern wall of the *khurus*, we have no clear evidence yet about the source of its inspiration, although it is certainly not based on canonical texts⁸.

CONCLUSION

The painting over the entrance of the former northern *pastoforion* of the church of the Holy Virgin in Deir al-Surian is unusual in its iconography. The obvious traces of remodelling of the doorway suggest that the painting was made after, and in connection with, a change in the function of this

room. The prominent presence of St James, brother of Jesus, could be seen as an indication that the *pastoforion* was turned into a sanctuary for Syrian monks. The proper interpretation of the iconology of the painting is more problematic. No biblical text seems to underlie this composition. If we consider the possibility of an apocryphal source of inspiration, the *Apocryphon of James* is a likely candidate.

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⁷ Innemée 1999a, [14], Fig. 4.

⁸ Innemée/Van Rompay 2002, [17], Figs 10, 11.

Icônes et ciboria: relation entre les ateliers coptes de peinture d'icônes et l'iconographie du mobilier liturgique en bois

Adeline JEUDY

Le ciborium, dais constitué d'une coupole montée sur quatre colonnes et placée au-dessus de l'autel d'une église, est un objet caractéristique dans la liturgie copte orthodoxe. L'intérêt porté pour le ciborium copte en bois est la conséquence de deux constats initiaux. En premier lieu, il est de fait que l'on retrouve un ciborium dans une église copte de façon presque systématique. Les églises du Caire ou de la région d'Akhmim en fournissent par exemple un nombre important. Tandis que le plus ancien ciborium conservé remonte à l'époque fatimide et fait figure de cas unique, tous les autres – trois exceptions mises à part –, toujours en place dans les églises, ne sont pas antérieurs au XVIII^e siècle¹. Le deuxième constat concerne le décor pictural dont ils font l'objet: celui-ci entretient un lien évident avec l'iconographie des ateliers de peinture d'icônes coptes du XVIII^e-XIX^e siècle. S'il arrive parfois que la qualité artistique de ces icônes soit contestée et jugée moindre par comparaison avec l'art copto-byzantin ou l'art copte médiéval, elles font pourtant l'objet d'un culte très actif au sein de la communauté copte contemporaine. Grâce au travail de l'équipe hollandaise de Leiden, sont désormais bien connus – et reconnus – les différents courants stylistiques de l'art de l'icône en Egypte².

Il est relativement aisé d'affilier chacun de ces ciboria à un artiste ou un atelier de peinture d'icônes, tant leur iconographie en présente le style caractéristique. Pourtant, aucune publication ne s'était jusqu'ici intéressée à ce sujet. Cette étude iconographique aura donc pour vocation de présenter ces objets de façon chronologique, selon le courant artistique auxquels ils appartiennent. C'est le peintre Mattary qui, au début du XVIII^e siècle, semble le premier à être invité à transférer le style personnel de ses icônes sur le «support ciborium», bientôt suivi, de façon presque contemporaine, par Ibrahim et Yuhanna, les peintres d'icônes coptes les plus populaires du XVIII^e siècle³. Poursuivant sur la voie de ses prédécesseurs, l'école de Jérusalem et son

«représentant» en Egypte, le peintre Anastasi – et son atelier –, signe également de sa touche particulière quelques ciboria du XIX^e siècle⁴. D'autre part, un style, peut-être même un véritable atelier, se fait remarquer sur nombre d'icônes, de ciboria et de coupoles en bois de la région d'Akhmim (Haute-Egypte). Le père Abd al-Shahid est l'un des artistes qui ont œuvré, au cours de la deuxième moitié du XIX^e siècle, à la diffusion de ce style empreint de culture populaire⁴. Enfin, trois ciboria semblent appartenir à une catégorie indépendante, puisque probablement plus ancienne. D'une iconographie tout à fait différente de celle des ateliers mentionnés précédemment, ces trois ciboria, préservés dans les sanctuaires de l'église al-Mu'allaka au Caire, présentent pourtant un registre tout à fait conventionnel, puisque d'inspiration byzantine. Il faut cependant garder une approche prudente à leur égard: on ne peut déduire de cette apparence byzantine leur antériorité par rapport aux ciboria précédents, dans la mesure où l'art copte a la particularité de remployer, même aujourd'hui, des motifs vieux de plusieurs centaines d'années⁵.

¹ Le ciborium fatimide, provenant de l'église al-Mu'allaka, est conservé au Musée Copte. Contrairement aux ciboria toujours en place dans les églises, celui-ci n'est pas peint au niveau interne de la coupole, mais présente une série de panneaux sculptés et fixés sur sa circonférence, figurant une arcature (Simaika 1938, 23, inv. no. 1175).

² Le catalogue des icônes du Musée Copte fait figure de synthèse de ce travail: Van Moorsel / Immerzeel / Langen 1994. Il est par ailleurs intéressant d'ajouter que ce développement de l'art de l'icône au XVIII^e siècle est l'une des expressions de la «renaissance copte», qui commence au début de ce siècle, favorisée, entre autres, par un premier ministre et une élite dominante coptes.

³ Van Moorsel / Immerzeel 1994, 38-40.

⁴ Immerzeel 1992, 14.

⁵ Ainsi le motif de la vigne est-il encore très populaire sur les iconostases du XX^e siècle!

Il est possible d'établir une iconographie-type du ciborium, dans la mesure où tous, à quelques variantes près, obéissent au même programme. Celui-ci est au demeurant très conventionnel: il peut en effet être comparé au programme iconographique des coupoles byzantines et des arcatures des absides coptes médiévales. Sur le ciborium, la décoration est répartie sur trois niveaux: l'intérieur de la coupole, les pendentifs et les écoinçons des arcs. Elle est rarement étendue aux colonnes qui soutiennent la structure. À quelques détails près, l'on retrouvera toujours dans la coupole d'un ciborium, un Christ Pantocrator maintenant le Livre de la main gauche et bénissant de la main droite, entouré des quatre Créatures de l'Apocalypse et parfois du soleil et de la lune. Cette iconographie conventionnelle est identique à celle que présentent les peintures murales largement développées dans les monastères coptes, notamment dans le Wadi Natrun. Néanmoins, l'équivalent du Pantocrator du ciborium se retrouve, dans ces monastères, au niveau de l'abside, et non de la coupole architecturale. En ce sens, il semblerait donc que l'iconographie du ciborium soit dérivée d'une part, du modèle fourni par les peintures murales des églises coptes et d'autre part, par le modèle général de la coupole byzantine. Suivant ce même modèle iconographique, quatre archanges occupent les pendentifs, lorsque ces derniers sont décorés: les archanges soutiennent de leurs bras la composition circulaire peinte au centre de la coupole. Les écoinçons, pour leur part, sont le support d'une iconographie qui présente des scènes bibliques mêlant Ancien et Nouveau Testament. L'Annonciation et le Sacrifice d'Isaac sont systématiquement représentés sur les écoinçons faisant face à la nef. Également, mais plus rarement, la Purification d'Isaïe, l'Annonce à

Zacharie, le vieillard Siméon recevant l'Enfant au Temple, Aaron en Grand Prêtre et Moïse recevant les Tables de la Loi, viennent compléter ce programme. Comme sur les arcatures des absides, l'idée de communion est présente à travers le choix de telles scènes. Il est possible d'établir un parallèle certain entre les écoinçons des ciboria et les arcatures peintes de plusieurs églises de monastères; cependant, ces thèmes ne sont pas exclusivement présents dans le sanctuaire puisqu'ils sont également populaires sur les icônes. Prenons en exemple le thème du Sacrifice d'Isaac. D'après l'inventaire des peintures murales inspirées de l'Ancien Testament effectué par G. van Loon, cette scène, reproduite sur l'arcature d'une abside, est présente dans quatre des églises les plus importantes d'Égypte (monastère Apa Jeremiah à Saqqarah, monastère Abu Maqar dans le Wadi Natrun, église Abu Saifein au Caire et monastère Saint-Antoine près de la Mer Rouge)⁶. Il est donc vraisemblable que les artistes du XVIII^e siècle aient pu s'inspirer du programme iconographique ancien des niches et absides des églises les plus populaires d'Égypte et l'interpréter avec leur style personnel.

LE PEINTRE MATTARY ET LE CIBORIUM DE LA CHAPELLE MAR JACOB À ABU SAIFEIN

Le ciborium de la chapelle adjacente à l'église Abu Saifein, dans le deir éponyme proche du Vieux-Caire, constitue le seul exemple (préservé) de ciborium peint par Mattary. Cet artiste d'origine arménienne est actif au début du XVIII^e siècle. De son style, nous retiendrons en particulier la façon dont le peintre représente les yeux⁷. Les yeux semblent constituer l'élément déterminant pour reconnaître une œuvre de Mattary, surtout lorsque la peinture est mal conservée. Tel est le cas du ciborium de la chapelle Mar Jacob, qui fort heureusement, malgré son état relativement mauvais, conserve quelques paires de ces yeux si caractéristiques. Si l'iconographie globale de l'intérieur de la coupole reste assez floue, l'on peut cependant distinguer quelques-uns des éléments qui la composent (Pl. 1). Trois figures sont notamment perceptibles: la première, dont seuls les yeux et le nez sont préservés, se trouve sur la circonférence de la coupole (Pl. 2); la deuxième, plus nette, présente l'esquisse d'un buste; et de la troisième figure, plus grande que les autres, au centre de la coupole, nous distinguons un visage complet (Pl. 3). Peut-être pourrions-nous

⁶ Van Loon 1999. En plus du Sacrifice d'Isaac, la Purification d'Isaïe est également figurée au monastère Abu Maqar et au monastère Saint-Antoine. On retrouve Aaron en Grand Prêtre à Abu Maqar et Moïse recevant les Tables de la Loi, de même à Abu Maqar, mais aussi à Bawit. Il ne s'agit ici que des scènes tirées de l'Ancien Testament. L'Annonciation, autre scène présente sur les ciboria, est également populaire dans l'iconographie peinte des architraves. Elle est par exemple figurée sur une architrave à Abu Maqar et sur une autre à Saint-Antoine près de la Mer Rouge. Voir: Leroy 1982, Pl. 41-42; Van Moorsel 2002, 23-24.

⁷ Van Moorsel / Immerzeel 1994, 39-40. Les yeux en forme d'amande, soulignés par des sourcils épais rejoignant un nez linéaire, donnent une morphologie orientale aux figures de Mattary.



Pl. 1. Ciborium peint par Mattary, Eglise Abu Saifein



Pl. 2. Ciborium peint par Mattary, détail



Pl. 3. Ciborium peint par Mattary, détail
(© Paul Van Moorsel Center for Christian Art, Leiden)

discerner l'ébauche d'un visage moustachu sous le grand visage central. Une dernière forme, animale, est relativement bien visible: un lion est représenté, tenant le Livre, dans la circonférence de la coupole. Si le corps de l'animal est correctement dessiné, en revanche, la tête de ce lion semble peu conforme à l'iconographie conventionnelle des Créatures de l'Apocalypse. Peut-être cette tête pour le moins étonnante constitue-elle un ajout postérieur à la peinture initiale de Mattary, telle une tentative maladroite de restauration.

Certes, le peu d'éléments conservés ne nous renseigne guère sur l'iconographie initiale. Mais par comparaison avec les autres ciboria, le détail du lion suggère l'hypothèse d'un programme relativement «classique», qui comprendrait les quatre Créatures de l'Apocalypse et le Christ au centre – peut-être le visage de taille supérieure aux autres est-il le sien. Bien que le ciborium ne soit pas signé, il semble pourtant certain qu'il soit l'œuvre de Mattary. Ainsi, bien qu'il ne s'agisse que de visages, il est possible de comparer ces éléments aux icônes du peintre arménien. Toutes les figures y arborent les yeux et nez caractéristiques de son style, peints sur des visages plats, sans volume. Nous citerons, à titre d'exemple, un triptyque provenant de l'église Sainte-Barbara, représentant Aba Kyr et Jean au centre, encadrés de sainte Barbara sur le volet droite et sainte Juliana sur le volet gauche⁸. La restauration de cette icône a permis de mettre en valeur les regards des figures saintes. C'est un regard similaire que présente saint Victor, sur un volet de triptyque conservé à Haret Zuweyla⁹. Le visage du saint est ici tout à fait identique à ceux que l'on retrouve sur le ciborium, notamment ce petit visage dont on ne conserve que le nez et les yeux. Sur une autre icône représentant saint Thekla Haymanot, conservée à Deir al-Suriani, on remarque, outre le visage caractéristique, que l'arc sous lequel se tient le saint est décoré d'un certain type de chevrons, que l'on retrouve également sur la circonférence de la coupole du ciborium¹⁰.

⁸ Atalla 1998, I, 66.

⁹ Atalla 1998, I, 67, bas.

¹⁰ Van Moorsel / Immerzeel 1994, 42, Abb. 4; 41, Abb. 3.

¹¹ Van Moorsel / Immerzeel / Langen 1994, 47; ces rangées d'icônes sont préservées dans l'église Saint-Michel du monastère et datent autour de 1731/32.

¹² Van Moorsel / Immerzeel 1994, 38.

Ce ciborium ne serait pas la seule réalisation de Mattary dans la même chapelle: les icônes peintes sur un seul bloc de bois, placé au dessus de l'iconostase, seraient aussi de sa main. Les traits du visage des douze figures saintes, représentées assises en tailleur, renforcent la morphologie orientale suggérée par les yeux en amande, que soulignent les épais sourcils. Au-delà de la ressemblance stylistique avec les visages du ciborium, cette rangée d'icônes vient confirmer la possibilité d'une commande d'œuvres au peintre Mattary à destination de la chapelle Mar Jacob. Il est également l'auteur de deux autres rangées d'icônes, préservées au monastère Saint-Paul près de la Mer Rouge¹¹. Si le ciborium de cette chapelle fait donc figure d'exception parmi l'ensemble de la production de Mattary, majoritairement composée d'icônes, il n'en illustre pas moins les détails caractéristiques du style de ce peintre.

L'ATELIER D'IBRAHIM ET YUHANNA:
LES CIBORIA D'ABU SAIFEIN, HARET ZUWEYLA,
MARI MINA ET ABU SARGA

L'activité artistique d'Ibrahim al-Nasikh et de Yuhanna al-Armani est effective de 1742 à 1780-1783¹². Très populaires, ils ont laissé une production abondante, parmi laquelle il n'est pas étonnant de retrouver quelques ciboria. S'ils sont tous conservés au Caire, trois d'entre eux peuvent être attribués de manière fiable à l'un ou l'autre des deux peintres et deux ciboria supplémentaires, s'ils ne sont pas de leur propre main, présentent tout au moins une relation évidente avec leur atelier. Les trois ciboria attribués aux deux peintres eux-mêmes sont préservés dans les sanctuaires principaux de l'église al-¹³Adra à Haret Zuweyla (al-Mouski), l'église Abu Saifein (église principale, contrairement à la chapelle annexe évoquée dans le paragraphe précédent) et l'église Mari Mina (Fomm al-Khalig). Si l'on peut attribuer les deux premiers ciboria à Yuhanna, le troisième serait l'œuvre soit du seul Ibrahim, soit des deux peintres. En effet, ils ont, à plusieurs occasions, co-signé des icônes. Bien qu'il soit possible que ces trois ciboria soient l'œuvre d'une participation commune, l'on peut cependant discerner les éléments distinctifs qui individualisent le style de chacun des deux peintres, quoique, de manière générale, leur style se ressemble beaucoup. Ces éléments se distinguent particulièrement au niveau de la morphologie des visages: tandis qu'Ibrahim a pour habitude de représenter des visages plutôt



Pl. 4. Ciborium d'Abu Saifein, sanctuaire principal



Pl. 5. Ciborium d'Abu Saifein, détail: Isaïe et le Vieux Siméon



Pl. 6. Ciborium d'Haret Zuweyla, sanctuaire principal

ronds et lourds, ceux de Yuhanna sont en revanche très allongés, en particulier au niveau du nez. Les yeux sont chez l'un ou l'autre peintre relativement grands et en forme d'amande: ils le paraissent d'autant plus sur les icônes d'Ibrahim où les visages sont plus concentrés. En revanche, les visages en forme de «poire» de Yuhanna semblent constituer l'une de ses caractéristiques stylistiques¹³.

¹³ De tels visages en forme de «poire» sont également adoptés, dans une moindre mesure, sur quelques icônes d'Ibrahim. En revanche, c'est le caractère systématique et plus approfondi de ces visages sur les icônes de Yuhanna qui en font l'une de ses caractéristiques. Pour une description plus complète du style d'Ibrahim et Yuhanna: Immerzeel 1992, 11; voir aussi Tribe 2004.

¹⁴ L'icône de saint Michel est reproduite dans: Atalla 1998, II, 103, droite.

¹⁵ Atalla 1998, I, 87.

C'est notamment ce type de visage, en forme de «poire» lorsqu'il est de face ou allongé lorsqu'il est de profil, que l'on retrouve sur les ciboria d'Abu Saifein et Haret Zuweyla (Pls 4, 6). Cette morphologie commune à toutes les figures, ajoutée à une composition tout à fait identique, suggère que ces deux ciboria sont l'œuvre de Yuhanna. Ceci se confirme lorsque l'on compare une icône de saint Michel, conservée à Mari Mina, avec les archanges du ciborium de la même église, ou avec la Vierge et l'archange Gabriel de l'Annonciation d'Abu Saifein, figurée sur les écoinçons qui font face à la nef¹⁴. Une autre icône de Yuhanna, conservée dans le colatéral droit d'Abu Saifein, rassemble tous les types de visages que l'on peut trouver sur ces ciboria: saint Mercure et les quatre autres protagonistes de la scène peuvent être comparés aux mêmes figures que précédemment, ainsi qu'aux figures des autres scènes décorant les écoinçons du ciborium d'Abu Saifein¹⁵. Ce dernier fait par ailleurs l'objet d'une

décoration plus riche, puisqu'elle est étendue à tous les écoinçons. On retrouve, outre l'Annonciation (également présente à Haret Zuweyla et Mari Mina), le Vieillard Siméon et Abraham sacrifiant son fils, Aaron et Moïse, Zacharie et Isaïe, représentés par binômes sur chaque arcature (Pl. 5). Une dernière icône de Yuhanna sera rapprochée du Christ de Haret Zuweyla et Abu Saifein: la position frontale de son visage révèle cette forme en «poire» si particulière au style de Yuhanna, adoptée pour représenter saints Cosme et Damien, figurés avec leurs trois frères et leur mère sur une icône provenant de l'église al-Mu'allaq¹⁶.

Il semble difficile de définir l'auteur de la figure du Christ dans le ciborium de Mari Mina (Pl. 7). En effet, si son visage adopte la forme en «poire» récurrente sur les icônes de Yuhanna, les écoinçons qui font face à la nef, en revanche, ont été peints par Ibrahim, si l'on en croit la morphologie des visages. Les anges des pendentifs présentent des visages similaires. Yuhanna aurait pu alors ne contribuer à la décoration du ciborium qu'au niveau d'une seule figure, le Christ, mais il existe tout de même une icône signée par Ibrahim où le visage du Christ adopte également cette forme particulière¹⁷. Par contre, la petite Vierge et Gabriel sur les écoinçons (Pl. 8), ainsi que les anges des pendentifs,



Pl. 7. Ciborium de Mari Mina, sanctuaire principal

illustrent bien le style d'Ibrahim, aux visages plus concentrés que ceux de Yuhanna, comme en témoigne une icône conservée à Abu Saifein, représentant la mère et la sœur de saint Isidore

¹⁶ Atalla 1998, I, 88, il est par ailleurs intéressant de comparer cette icône à une autre présentant le même sujet mais peint par Ibrahim, p.116. Les différences stylistiques entre les deux peintres sont évidentes.

¹⁷ Van Moorsel / Immerzeel / Langen 1994, 22 n° 14: «Christ Pantocrator au milieu des vingt-quatre vieillards», Musée Copte n° 3443, signée par Ibrahim et datée de 1768.



Pl. 8. Ciborium de Mari Mina, détail: Vierge de l'Annonciation



Pl. 9. Ciborium du sanctuaire de Mar Behnam, Eglise Mari Mina



PL. 10. Ciborium d'Abu Sarga, sanctuaire principal

d'Antioche, Sophia et Euphemia¹⁸. La Vierge du ciborium et Sophia entretiennent en l'occurrence une grande similitude. Gabriel et les anges des pendentifs sont pour leur part comparables à une icône de saint Georges, conservée au Musée Copte et peinte par Ibrahim¹⁹.

Deux autres ciboria suggèrent chacun une thématique qui leur est propre, mais pourtant liée au même point de départ: les origines arméniennes de Yuhanna. Le ciborium du sanctuaire de Mar Behnam et sa sœur Sarah à Mari Mina présente pour sa part une iconographie inspirée du style personnel de Yuhanna, plutôt que celui d'Ibrahim, notamment pour les visages (Pl. 9). Ce ciborium est le seul à être daté, en l'occurrence de 1780, ce qui correspond donc à la période d'activité de l'atelier de Yuhanna et Ibrahim. Si les origines iconographiques du ciborium de Mar Behnam ne font aucun doute, celui qui est conservé dans le sanctuaire principal de l'église Abu Sarga (Vieux-Caire) semble en revanche, et de façon étonnante, réminiscent d'un art italo-flamand (Pl. 10). L'influence arménienne est un facteur non négligeable dans l'œuvre de Yuhanna et serait en rapport avec cette dernière problématique. Comme Mattary, Yuhanna fait partie de la communauté arménienne, depuis longtemps installée au Caire, essentiellement constituée d'artisans²⁰. Yuhanna *al-Armani al-Qudsi*, tel qu'il le signe parfois sur ses icônes, a émigré de Jérusalem²¹. Deux arguments pourraient expliquer la présence d'un style italo-flamand sur un ciborium copte, qui nécessite une certaine culture occidentale de la part de l'artiste qui l'a peint. Yuhanna ou un autre Arménien pourraient en effet être cet artiste, leurs origines pouvant expliquer ce style «occidentalisé». La probable connaissance des peintures murales arméniennes du XVII^e siècle des églises de Nouvelle Djoulfa (Iran) ou d'Ayrarat (nord Turquie), constituerait un premier argument en faveur de cette hypothèse²². Il faut à cela ajouter la tradition italo-flamande présente chez les Arméniens, entretenue par le biais des images pieuses. C'est en effet la tradition italienne qui est à l'origine d'une icône représentant Jonas, conservée à Abu Saifein et peinte par Yuhanna, puisque cette icône est une copie d'un modèle italien du XVI^e siècle²³. Ainsi, Yuhanna aurait pu utiliser une telle image, tirée d'une bible italienne qu'il aurait eu à sa disposition, ou du moins une copie. Il est fort possible qu'il eût une telle bible en sa possession: les Arméniens avaient en effet pour tradition

de faire imprimer leurs bibles en Europe. Il s'agit donc probablement d'une des raisons pour lesquelles l'art arménien revêt un caractère occidental, d'un point de vue technique et iconographique, même dans des églises orientales telles que celles de Nouvelle Djoulfa ou d'Ayrarat. On retrouve également, dans deux églises arméniennes d'Isphahan, des peintures murales du XVII^e siècle contenant une copie de la Tour de Babel de Brueghel. Et à Jérusalem, dont Yuhanna est originaire, il était encore possible, il y a quelques années, de trouver des bibles illustrées par des artistes néerlandais dans le Patriarcat arménien²⁴. Ce sont donc pour ses raisons que le décor du ciborium d'Abu Sarga, peint à la «manière italienne», ne semble finalement pas si étonnante, mais reste unique en son genre.

ANASTASI ET «L'ÉCOLE DE JÉRUSALEM»:
LES CIBORIA D'AL-DAMSHIRIYYAH, D'HARET
AR-RUM ET D'AL-^cADRA À BABYLONE AD-DARAG

Anastasi *al-Rumi al-Qudsi* est le troisième peintre d'icônes coptes incontournable. Plus encore qu'Ibrahim et Yuhanna, Anastasi étend son savoir-

¹⁸ Atalla 1998, I, 110.

¹⁹ Van Moorsel / Immerzeel / Langen, 1994, 27, no 20: signée par Ibrahim, Musée Copte inv. no. 3366.

²⁰ Raymond 1973-74, 500-501.

²¹ Immerzeel 1992, 11.

²² Bien que le style de Yuhanna lui soit véritablement personnel, on peut toutefois comparer la morphologie de ses visages, la blancheur de leur peau, les couleurs vives de ses icônes et leurs fonds agrémentés de motifs floraux avec, par exemple, la figure de saint Nersès représentée dans l'église de Bethléem en Nouvelle Djoulfa, datant du XVII^e siècle, ou les peintures du chœur de l'église Saint-Georges de Mulni en Ayrarat, représentant saint Nicolas et sainte Hripsimé. Voir: Donabédian / Thierry 1987, Ill. 167 et 162. On peut également comparer la composition naïve similaire de deux Résurrections, l'une peinte sur une icône conservée à Deir al-Muharrak (Assiout) attribuée à «l'école» de Yuhanna et Ibrahim (Atalla 1998, Part 2, 72) et l'autre illustrant un manuscrit de 1661 de Nouvelle Djoulfa (Donabédian / Thierry 1987, ill. 509: MS ND no. 512 f° 188V).

²³ D'après une communication de M. Immerzeel.

²⁴ D'après une communication informelle de P. van Moorsel à M. Immerzeel. L'influence occidentale, diffusée via les images pieuses, est également un argument utilisé par O. Meinardus pour justifier l'iconographie d'un proskynetion de Nouvelle Djoulfa. Il rappelle à cette occasion que les Arméniens du XVII^e siècle possédaient une Bible décorée par Christoffel van Sichem, néerlandais, lui-même élève de Goltzius, dont les Bibles, décorées à Amsterdam, étaient en majorité à destination des Arméniens: Meinardus, O. 2004, '17th Century Armenian Proskynitaria of Jerusalem', dans: *Series Byzantina*, in preparation.

faire à d'autres supports tels que les ciboria, mais aussi les tabernacles, les panneaux peints et les peintures murales²⁵. L'étendue considérable de sa production suggère qu'il était à la tête d'un véritable atelier: celui-ci couvre une grande partie du XIX^e siècle puisque Anastasi est actif de 1832 à 1871²⁶. Tout comme Yuhanna, il est originaire de Jérusalem, dont il a, pour sa part, «importé» l'école en Egypte. Cette «école de Jérusalem» bénéficie d'une popularité effective dans le tout le monde proche-oriental, notamment en Syrie²⁷. Le style d'Anastasi se caractérise par des figures de forte corpulence adoptant une position frontale, aux visages ovales, au teint blanc et aux yeux en amande, comme le montre une icône des saintes Barbara et Juliana conservée à Haret Zuweyla²⁸.

Les trois ciboria issus de son atelier sont conservés au Caire dans les sanctuaires principaux des églises d'al-^cAdra à Haret ar-Rum (Pl. 11), d'al-^cAdra dans le quartier de Babylone ad-Darag (Pl. 12) et d'al-Damshiriyyah à Deir Abu Saifein (Pl. 13). S'ils reflètent tous trois le style de «l'école de Jérusalem», il semble cependant que seul le ciborium d'al-Damshiriyyah soit de la main d'Anastasi lui-même, tandis que les deux autres seraient issus de son atelier. Un effort de modelé des visages, sur le ciborium de Babylone ad-Darag, que l'on ne retrouve pas sur les œuvres d'Anastasi, ainsi que des 'mains' vraisemblablement différentes, sont les indices qui confirmeraient une telle hypothèse. L'iconographie générale reste cependant conventionnelle: le Christ en buste, les quatre Créatures de l'Apocalypse, le soleil et la lune, répartis selon des axes concentriques, complétés des quatre archanges dans les pendentifs, sont peints dans des couleurs vives. Les écoinçons du ciborium de Haret ar-Rum n'ont pas été peints. Le Sacrifice d'Isaac est en revanche figuré à Babylone ad-Darag sur les écoinçons qui font face à la nef. Et le ciborium

d'al-Damshiriyyah présente pour sa part un programme aussi complet que celui du ciborium d'Abu Saifein, incluant l'Annonciation – faisant face à la nef – et Isaïe, Zacharie et le Sacrifice d'Isaac en périphérie de la coupole.

Les sanctuaires de Babylone ad-Darag et de Haret ar-Rum font l'objet d'un programme iconographique complet peint par Anastasi et son atelier. Les panneaux qui sont plaqués sur les parois du sanctuaire et l'icône du «Christ trônant» dans l'abside centrale sont issus du même modèle que celui des ciboria. Il en est d'ailleurs de même dans le haykal d'Abu Saifein, bien que le ciborium soit, en revanche, l'œuvre de Yuhanna.

On peut comparer ces trois ciboria – et en particulier celui d'al-Damshiriyyah – aux icônes suivantes. Les anges des pendentifs sont similaires à un Archange Gabriel conservé à al-^cAdra à Maadi (Le Caire), signé par Anastasi²⁹. Outre l'icône des saintes Barbara et Juliana mentionnée précédemment, on peut également comparer le visage frontal du Christ et ses traits caractéristiques à ceux de saint Shenouda et Anba Wissa, figurés sur une icône conservée à Haret ar-Rum³⁰. Cette église est par ailleurs celle qui rassemble le plus grand nombre d'icônes peintes par Anastasi: ce n'est donc pas un hasard si l'on y retrouve également un ciborium issu de son atelier.

LE «STYLE DE LA RÉGION D'AKHMIM»: LES CIBORIA DE DEIR ANBA THOMAS, DEIR ANBA BAKHUM ET SA SOEUR DALUSHAM ET DEIR AL-MALAK

Au cours de la deuxième moitié du XIX^e siècle, émerge en Haute Egypte, dans la région d'Akhmim, un style populaire voire folklorique, dit «style d'Akhmim»; l'on ne possède en réalité que peu de données concernant les artistes qui l'ont diffusé. Un prêtre, Abuna Abd al-Shahid, a néanmoins signé quelques icônes. Si les figures d'Akhmim présentent des yeux étirés en amande comme sur la majorité des icônes coptes contemporaines, elles se caractérisent cependant par des traits moins fins que ceux des figures de Mattary ou de Yuhanna et par des détails vestimentaires particuliers. Ainsi les figures masculines revêtent-elles souvent un manteau à épaisses rayures et les figures féminines un châle à pois, dérivés des costumes de la région. Le style d'Akhmim adopte également une iconographie qui lui est propre. Outre le fait que les saints locaux soient largement représentés – d'où le caractère

²⁵ Un ambon en bois peint conservé à Haret ar-Rum ferait également partie de la production de son atelier.

²⁶ Van Moorsel / Immerzeel 1994, 39.

²⁷ Le ciborium peint du monastère Saints-Serge-et-Bacchus à Ma'alula, datant de 1821-24, présente en effet une iconographie reflétant, de manière générale, «l'école de Jérusalem», puisqu'elle est similaire à celle de nombreuses icônes de «Christ trônant» peintes par Anastasi.

²⁸ Meinardus 1970-71, 390, 392; Immerzeel 1992, 13.

²⁹ Atalla 1998, II, 50 (à gauche)

³⁰ Cette icône est commentée dans Meinardus 1970-71, 394, no. 21.



Pl. 11. Ciborium d'al-Adra, Haret al-Rum, sanctuaire principal



Pl. 12. Ciborium d'al-Adra, Babylone ad-Darag, sanctuaire principal



Pl. 13. *Ciborium d'al-Damshiriyah, Deir Abu Saifein, sanctuaire principal*

populaire de ce style –, l'intérieur des ciboria et coupes en bois est le support d'une double représentation: le Christ trônant dans une mandorle, symétriquement opposé à la Vierge trônant elle aussi, chacun étant encadré de deux anges et/ou deux saints³¹. On observe également une variante technique du ciborium: plusieurs ciboria deviennent de véritables coupes «doublant» la coupole architecturale, dans la mesure où les colonnes sur lesquelles ces ciboria reposent habituellement sont remplacées par une structure en bois incluant poutres et faux plafond, dans lequel le dôme est encastré. La fonction d'une telle coupole reste cependant la même que celle du ciborium, puisqu'elle ne remplace

aucunement la coupole architecturale de l'église. Une dernière caractéristique technique liée à ces ciboria réside dans l'adoption de pendentifs en forme de conques grossièrement sculptées.

Les trois ciboria retenus pour illustrer ce style sont localisés dans les églises de petits monastères de campagne autour d'Akhmim. On retrouve ce type de ciborium dans nombre d'églises de la région, de Sohag à Tahta. Le ciborium de Deir Anba Thomas est le plus connu d'entre tous (Pl. 14). C'est de ce monastère que provient la plupart des icônes signées par Abd al-Shahid. Le contexte originel de ce ciborium, aujourd'hui déplacé de son sanctuaire d'origine, l'incluait dans un programme où il complétait les peintures murales de la coupole. Trônant dans une mandorle, le Christ adopte des traits peu conventionnels: une barbe noire taillée en pointe et un bonnet rouge ne laissant pas découvrir de chevelure. Il est entouré des quatre Créatures de l'Apocalypse. Sous son trône sont figurés deux saints locaux, Bakhum (Pacôme) et sa sœur Dalusham. La Vierge, trônant également, est encadrée de quatre anges, tandis que deux saints cavaliers sont figurés sous son trône. Elle porte le châle à pois caractéristique des figures féminines d'Akhmim.

Les deux ciboria suivants sont moins bien conservés que le précédent. Ils adoptent la structure particulière qui les inclut dans un faux plafond et donne au ciborium l'apparence d'une simple coupole de bois. Le premier d'entre eux est préservé dans l'église du discret Deir Anba Bakhum et sa sœur Dalusham, au cœur du village de Sawama (Pl. 15). L'intérieur de la coupole présente la même iconographie que précédemment, à l'exception que le Christ et la Vierge sont chacun encadrés de deux saints cavaliers, dont au moins l'un d'entre eux est représenté tuant un dragon, et de deux anges au-dessus de leur tête. Une colombe peinte occupe le centre de la coupole. Saint Thomas, Anba Bakhum et Dalusham, un autre couple de saints (probablement Kyrkos et sa mère Juliette) et un saint cavalier, sont figurés entre les pendentifs en forme de conque. En ce sens, cette coupole est comparable à celle du ciborium de l'église Abu Saifein à Akhmim, qui adopte une composition similaire³². Enfin, bien qu'elles soient relativement mal préservées, les quatre Créatures de l'Apocalypse entourent la mandorle du Christ de la même façon que sur le ciborium de Deir Anba Thomas.

Le troisième ciborium se trouve à Deir al-Malak, monastère bâti sur une colline non loin du village

³¹ Une iconographie similaire a été choisie pour décorer la coupole du ciborium syrien de l'église Saints-Serge-et-Bacchus à Ma'alula, peint dans le style de l'école de Jérusalem. Il existe d'autre part une représentation de Christ trônant dans une mandorle, figurée sur la circonférence d'une coupole et non en son centre, dans une coupole du monastère Saint-Paul près de la Mer Rouge, peinte au XVIII^e siècle. Le Christ n'y est cependant pas diamétralement opposé à la Vierge trônant et le reste de la circonférence de la coupole est décoré d'anges sonnant l'oliphant.

³² Atalla 2002, 19.



Pl. 14. Ciborium de Deir Anba Thomas, près d'Akhmim



Pl. 15. *Ciborium de Deir Anba Bakhum, près d'Akhmim, sanctuaire principal*

d'al-Salamuni (Pl. 16). Bien que les peintures de ce ciborium ne soient que partiellement conservées, l'on en distingue cependant l'iconographie, identifiable dans la mesure où elle semble similaire à celle des autres ciboria. La figure diamétralement opposée au Christ dans sa mandorle est très probablement la Vierge. Le Christ revêt quant à lui le manteau rayé caractéristique des figures masculines d'Akhmim. Il semble qu'il soit encadré, de même que la Vierge, de deux anges hexaptéryges. L'absence de panneaux peints ne permet cependant pas de confirmer qu'il est entouré des quatre Créatures. La couleur bleue, utilisée comme fond de l'iconographie, caractérise ce ciborium dans la mesure où les icônes et peintures d'Akhmim ne présentent généralement pas de tonalité aussi vive, voire crue.

³³ Atalla 1998, I, 64, bas.

³⁴ Atalla 1998, II, 47, droite.

Plusieurs icônes sont comparables aux figures de ces ciboria. En juxtaposant ces dernières à «Anba Bakhum et sa sœur Dalusham», peints sur une icône conservée dans le deir éponyme, l'on serait amené à penser que l'iconographie akhmimienne se caractérise par des figures peu individualisées, tant au niveau des traits de leur visage que de leurs vêtements³³. C'est ce que semblent aussi confirmer «Saints Michel et Gabriel» peints sur une icône provenant de l'église Saints-Cyprien-et-Justine à al-Maraghah³⁴. Qu'il s'agisse du Christ, d'une figure sainte masculine ou d'un archange, tous adoptent la même coiffure. Les traits de leur visage sont également similaires et Anba Bakhum sur la première icône diffère peu du Christ des ciboria de Deir Anba Thomas, Deir Anba Bakhum et de l'église Abu Saifein. Pourtant, le Christ adopte des traits qui lui sont propres – et plus proches d'une iconographie conventionnelle –, sur une icône de Crucifixion peinte par Abd al-Shahid en 1868,



Pl. 16. *Ciborium de Deir al-Malak, près d'Akhmim, sanctuaire principal*

conservée au Musée Copte et provenant de Deir al-Naghamish³⁵. Il existe d'autres icônes de Crucifixion ou de Résurrection, peintes dans le style d'Akhmim, où le Christ présente également des traits plus conventionnels (quoique la scène en elle-même ne le soit pas). Dans la région d'Akhmim, l'iconographie du Christ trônant choisie pour décorer les ciboria semble donc caractéristique de ce support.

En 1965, Jules Leroy attribuait une origine éthiopienne à une icône de Vierge à l'Enfant conservée au Musée Copte³⁶. Si cette icône est bien égyptienne, le style d'Akhmim n'était alors pas reconnu. Mais ce n'est pas à tort que l'on peut le comparer aux icônes éthiopiennes du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle³⁷. Le caractère naïf commun aux icônes d'Akhmim et d'Ethiopie, révélateur d'une ferveur populaire, souligne le lien religieux qui unit les deux pays. L'on citera en exemple un diptyque éthiopien double-face du XVI^e-XVII^e siècle, caractéristique des styles «Pré- et Premier Gondar», l'une des faces figurant

une Vierge à l'Enfant et saint Georges, l'autre une Crucifixion et Adam et Eve³⁸. Peintes dans des couleurs primaires très vives, les figures de ces icônes adoptent des traits simples et épais et leurs corps sont suggérés par des formes géométriques élémentaires. Leurs vêtements rayés, peu conventionnels, ne sont pas sans rappeler ceux que portent les figures d'Akhmim, ainsi que leurs yeux étirés en amande. De même, la miniature de manuscrit choisie par J. Leroy pour la comparer à l'icône du Musée Copte, présente une Vierge à l'Enfant dont le corps stylisé nous évoque celui des saints d'Akhmim lorsqu'ils sont figurés en position frontale³⁹. La présence d'une 'influence' éthiopienne en Egypte n'est pas

³⁵ Van Moorsel / Immerzeel / Langen 1994, 60-61, no. 68.

³⁶ Leroy 1965, 229-248.

³⁷ Immerzeel 1992, 14.

³⁸ Chojnacki 2000, 110; 338-339, no. 70.

³⁹ Leroy 1965, Pl. LXXXVI, fig. 2: miniature de manuscrit, monastère Gunda Gundé dans l'Agamé.

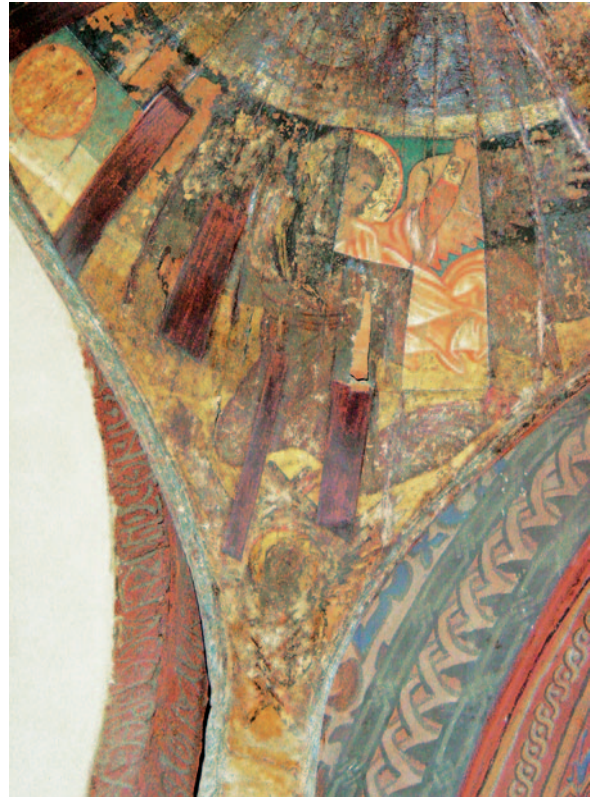
étonnante: en effet, l'adoption de la religion copte en Éthiopie est la «clé de voûte» du rapprochement des deux communautés chrétiennes et la dépendance de l'Église éthiopienne au Patriarcat d'Alexandrie, ainsi que la rapide traduction des textes égyptiens, ont favorisé la diffusion d'une influence bilatérale. Les icônes d'Akhmim ne sont pas la seule manifestation de cette influence. Le saint éthiopien Thekla Haymanot est ainsi relativement populaire en Égypte, puisqu'un sanctuaire lui est dédié au XIII^e siècle, dans l'église al-Mu'allāqa au Caire, et qu'il est le sujet de plusieurs icônes, dont une de Mattary, conservée à Deir al-Suriani, et deux autres non signées, conservée à Deir Anba Antonius pour l'une et à Mari Mina au Caire, pour l'autre. Un second saint d'origine éthiopienne, Ibrahim l'Éthiopien, est le sujet d'une icône attribuée à Mattary et conservée dans l'église Abu Saifein au Caire⁴⁰. Si la nature de la relation qui existe entre les icônes d'Akhmim et celles d'Éthiopie reste à explorer, cette affinité n'en est pas moins réelle et il semblait intéressant de la signaler dans le présent paragraphe.

UNE ICONOGRAPHIE UNIQUE: LES TROIS CIBORIA D'AL-MU'ALLAQA⁴¹

Les trois ciboria qui sont toujours en place dans l'église al-Mu'allāqa suggèrent une tout autre influence que celle des ateliers de peinture d'icônes

⁴⁰ L'icône de Mattary représentant Thekla Haymanot est reproduite dans: Van Moorsel / Immerzeel 1994, 41, Abb. 3. Il s'agit en réalité d'un repeint d'une icône figurant à l'origine «Sanctus Petrus», réminiscence de la présence des Missionnaires catholiques en Égypte, que l'on peut comparer à la présence des Missionnaires jésuites en Éthiopie au XVII^e siècle grâce à laquelle l'iconographie mariale y est diffusée. La deuxième icône de Thekla Haymanot, conservée à Deir Anba Antonius, a été restaurée par Zuzana Skalova et est illustrée dans: Skalova 1990, 86, Pl.5.4. L'on pourrait par ailleurs soulever une piste de réflexion intéressante quant au lien que semble entretenir le peintre Mattary avec l'Éthiopie: en effet, au moins deux de ces icônes représentent des saints éthiopiens et son style est également assez proche de celui d'Akhmim, près d'un siècle avant l'apparition de ce dernier.

⁴¹ Pour ce paragraphe, je souhaiterais remercier M. Mahmoud Breqa (Supreme Council of Antiquities of Egypt), directeur du projet de restauration des ciboria d'al-Mu'allāqa, de m'avoir autorisée à publier mes propres photographies et M. Marcin Kozarzewski, de m'avoir transmis son rapport personnel et détaillé sur les échantillons de restauration que lui et son équipe ont réalisés en février 2003 sur les ciboria.



Pl. 17. Ciborium d'al-Mu'allāqa, sanctuaire sud-est

coptes. Actuellement en restauration, l'on ne peut distinguer clairement les détails de leur décor: il sera donc plus prudent d'admettre qu'un jugement formel sur leur traitement ne pourra être émis qu'à la lumière d'une restauration achevée. Mais leur iconographie semble à première vue d'inspiration byzantine et donc, plus ancienne. Or, jusqu'à présent, l'on ne connaît «officiellement» aucun ciborium entre celui, fatimide, du Musée Copte (provenant également d'al-Mu'allāqa) et celui d'Abu Saifein qui est attribué à Mattary, datant du début du XVIII^e siècle. Mais l'apparence byzantine constitue-t-elle pour autant l'indication d'une datation ancienne? Partant du constat que l'art copte a la spécificité de remployer les motifs anciens, l'on ne saurait se fier à l'évidence première. Si l'iconographie semble certes byzantine, aucun élément de comparaison convaincant n'a pour le moment été trouvé parmi les modèles byzantins tels que les peintures murales des coupôles grecques, chypriotes ou cappadociennes, ou que les icônes du Sinaï et de Crète, et encore moins parmi les icônes post-byzantines syriennes du XVIII^e siècle.

Ces trois ciboria sont conservés dans les sanctuaires de l'église principale. En cours de restauration, il est difficile de discerner la totalité de leur iconographie, en particulier celle du ciborium sud-est (Pl. 17), en très mauvais état, ainsi que les détails du ciborium est (Pl. 18)⁴². Néanmoins, celui du sanctuaire sud est suffisamment bien préservé pour que l'on en distingue le style caractéristique (Pl. 19). Il est également le seul à avoir bénéficié d'une analyse technique préalablement à sa restauration. Plusieurs détails, observables sur chacun des ciboria, suggèrent qu'ils seraient tous trois issus du même atelier: des couleurs pâles (tons roses et gris), tout à fait différentes des couleurs utilisées sur les ciboria du XVIII^e-XIX^e siècle, et qui sont, en ce sens, caractéristiques; des arcatures sculptées au niveau de leur bordure, sous forme de fine frise soulignant l'arc, tandis que les ciboria du XVIII^e-XIX^e siècle ne comportent aucun élément sculpté; des détails iconographiques identiques dans les trois coupes, en particulier au niveau des archanges des pendentifs -dont la position des jambes, complexe, est similaire- et des anges hexaptéryges figurés dans le prolongement de la colonne. Ce sont les couleurs pâles qui fournissent, pour le moment, un seul et unique élément de comparaison éventuel, avec les coupes peintes de certaines églises chypriotes, en particulier celles de l'église Panagia Kanakaria à Lythrankomi⁴³.

Les paragraphes précédents mettaient en évidence le fait que la majeure partie des ciboria encore en place aujourd'hui sont attribuables aux écoles de peinture d'icônes du XVIII^e-XIX^e siècle. Dans l'hypothèse où les ciboria d'al-Mu'allāqa seraient effectivement médiévaux, alors ceux-ci feraient figure de cas unique en Egypte, tant pour leur datation que pour leur iconographie. Leur datation est controversée et les avis divergent parmi les restaurateurs et historiens de l'art extérieurs à la campagne de restauration. Si la majorité suggère une datation médiévale, une petite minorité propose également une datation récente, plus ou moins contemporaine des autres ciboria. L'on peut d'ores et déjà écarter l'hypothèse du XVII^e siècle: l'on ne pourrait dire que ces ciboria en adoptent les caractéristiques techniques dans la mesure où celles-ci ne sont pas connues pour ce siècle. D'autre part, une iconographie byzantine aussi bien imitée au XVIII^e-XIX^e siècle semblerait surprenante, quoique pas impossible, puisque telle est la vocation des icônes post-byzantines syriennes. Cependant, le traitement

de ces icônes ne ressemble en rien à celui des ciboria d'al-Mu'allāqa.

Le ciborium fatimide conservé au Musée Copte, dans la mesure où il provient de la même église, nous fournit un premier indice quant à leur histoire. Puisqu'ils ont nécessairement remplacé un (ou des) ciborium antérieur, nous pouvons donc arrêter le X^e-XI^e siècle, datation du ciborium du Musée Copte, comme terminus post quem le plus ancien. L'on ne sait pas exactement quand celui-ci fut remplacé. Il comporte un seul point commun avec les trois autres ciboria, à savoir l'existence de panneaux sculptés formant une succession d'arcs autour de la coupole. S'il n'y a que sur le ciborium fatimide que ces petits arcs soient sculptés, en revanche, l'arcature de chacun de ces panneaux, sur les quatre ciboria, est peinte de motifs ornementaux, qui seront particulièrement populaires sur les céramiques, faïences, poutres de plafonds peintes, mosaïques etc., de la fin du XIV^e siècle mamelouk jusqu'au XVII^e siècle ottoman⁴⁴. La présence de tels ornements sur les panneaux du ciborium fatimide semble étonnante: peut-être s'agit-il d'un repeint ultérieur⁴⁵?

Il existe une deuxième hypothèse, qui préciserait le contexte de création de ces trois ciboria. Pour dater les icônes byzantines encastrées dans l'écran du sanctuaire de Thekla Haymanot, dans la petite église annexe, L.-A. Hunt utilise comme argument en faveur d'une datation médiévale, une hypothèse fort intéressante, mais qui ne peut malheureusement pas être vérifiée⁴⁶. Elle mentionne en effet un

⁴² Une campagne de restauration en février 2003, menée par une équipe polonaise, visait à effectuer des échantillons afin de préparer la restauration future et les problèmes qu'elle pourrait poser. La restauration véritable a ensuite débuté en février 2004, menée par une équipe russe.

⁴³ Megaw / Hawkins 1977, Fig. 118: parmi les nombreuses fresques de l'église, c'est le Christ de l'Ascension figurée dans l'abside qui serait comparable, pour ses couleurs pâles et ses traits légèrement cernés de noir, aux ciboria d'al-Mu'allāqa.

⁴⁴ Prisse d'Avennes 1999, 110-133, 175-17, 181-182; Bourgoin 1892, II, Pl. 37-40.

⁴⁵ Un tel repeint est fort possible: en effet, sur un panneau isolé du Musée Copte (inv. no. 909), presque identique aux panneaux du ciborium fatimide et provenant vraisemblablement d'un ciborium, un repeint a été effectué dans l'arcature par-dessus la décoration sculptée, présentant le même type de motifs ornementaux, sans logique aucune puisque notamment, des bandes peintes recouvrent l'ancienne croix centrale et les palmettes horizontalement.

⁴⁶ Hunt 1998, 62-68; Zuzana Skalova confirme par ailleurs que ces icônes sont effectivement byzantines: Skalova/Gabra 2003, 107.



Pl. 18. Ciborium d'al-Mu'allaqah, sanctuaire est



Pl. 19. Ciborium d'al-Mu'allaqah, sanctuaire sud

renouvellement du mobilier liturgique qui aurait eu cours au début du XIV^e siècle, sous le califat de Qalawun, et qui aurait été effectué et financé par la Cour byzantine. Elle suggère que la cour aurait pu fournir son équipe – byzantine – pour effectuer le travail. Une hypothèse similaire pourrait bien être envisagée pour les ciboria. Et le fait que les trois ciboria semblent issus du même atelier – donc qu'ils aient été réalisés de façon contemporaine – , aurait pu jouer en faveur d'une telle hypothèse. Ainsi, tous les sanctuaires de l'église principale auraient pu être pourvus de nouveaux ciboria lors d'une même campagne de renouvellement du mobilier, telle que l'hypothétique campagne du début du XIV^e siècle. Malheureusement, la source historique mentionnée par L.-A. Hunt ne correspond pas à un tel événement: en 1301, à défaut d'un renouvellement du mobilier liturgique à al-Mu'allāqa, c'est l'église qui est tout simplement réouverte, sous la pression de «*Lascaris, empereur des Francs*», après un an de fermeture imposée par le calife⁴⁷. Rien n'indique donc que l'on ait restauré l'église à cette occasion et encore moins qu'elle le fut à l'initiative d'un centre byzantin. Néanmoins, bien qu'elle ne bénéficie pas pour le moment d'un fondement historique, l'hypothèse d'un renouvellement complet du mobilier des sanctuaires, à l'époque médiévale, reste plausible. Les recherches et restaurations en cours viendront confirmer – ou infirmer – cette hypothèse.

Plusieurs détails indiquent que les trois ciboria sont résolument plus anciens que ceux qu'il est habitué d'observer dans les églises coptes. Un premier indice, basé sur leur apparence première, est suggéré par leur état de conservation, plus mauvais que celui des ciboria «modernes». Bien que tous les ciboria du Caire et d'Akhmim aient un jour ou l'autre fait l'objet d'une restauration plus ou moins rigoureuse, l'état actuel des trois ciboria d'al-Mu'allāqa n'est pas comparable à celui des exemples précédents. L'intérieur des coupes a notamment été consolidé de façon peu élégante par des morceaux de bois au niveau de chaque fissure du support peint. La peinture est dans un grand état de saleté, particulièrement dans le ciborium sud-est. L'analyse du ciborium sud a pourtant révélé que la peinture avait fait l'objet de restaurations antérieures. Outre l'iconographie, qui suggère en elle-même une datation plus ancienne que le XVIII^e siècle, un détail, celui de la coiffure des archanges, vient renforcer l'hypothèse byzantine



Pl. 20. Détail du ciborium du sanctuaire sud: archange

(Pl. 20). Sur le ciborium sud, les archanges des pendentifs sont en effet coiffés d'une sorte de petit «diadème» constitué d'un bandeau et d'une pierre centrale, dont le seul équivalent égyptien se trouve parmi les peintures datées de 1232/1233 dans l'église principale du monastère Saint-Antoine près de la Mer Rouge. Sur l'arcade supérieure du khurus et sur l'arcade sud-ouest de la nef, saint Michel et saint Gabriel portent un «diadème» similaire (Pl. 21)⁴⁸. Composé d'un bandeau bleu et blanc et d'une pierre rouge, il est la réplique approximative du «diadème» des archanges du ciborium sud⁴⁹. Un détail presque similaire est attesté sur une icône de saint Michel datant du XIII^e siècle, conservée au

⁴⁷ Quatremère 1845, II, 180: «*Des ambassadeurs, envoyés de Lascaris, empereur des Francs, étant venus solliciter l'ouverture de ces édifices, on rouvrit l'église de Moallakah, située dans le ville de Misr (...)*»

⁴⁸ Bolman, 2002, 128, Fig. 8.3: illustration focalisant sur le visage du saint Michel du khurus.

⁴⁹ La seule différence entre les deux «diadèmes» consiste en l'absence, à Saint-Antoine, des quatre petits points blancs qui encadrent la pierre rouge à al-Mu'allāqa.



Pl. 21. *Archange du khurus de l'église Saint-Antoine, Deir Anba Antonius*

monastère Sainte-Catherine au Sinaï⁵⁰. E. Bolman, dans son ouvrage sur Saint-Antoine, compare d'ailleurs les «diadèmes» des archanges du khurus à une icône chypriote de saint Gabriel, datant de 1200 environ: bien que l'archange soit une fois de plus coiffé d'un petit «diadème», sa pierre est en revanche plus ronde et son bandeau plus fin⁵¹. Enfin, on retrouve ce type de coiffure sur plusieurs icônes byzantines égyptiennes du XIII^e siècle, conservées dans l'église Abu Saifein et très récemment publiées par Zuzana Skalova: le bandeau bleuté et sa pierre rouge coiffent discrètement les anges des médaillons au dessus d'une succession de prophètes, d'anges, de saints moines et saints évêques, dont le centre est occupé par une Vierge à

l'Enfant trônant, ou encore d'une série de saints cavaliers⁵². Sur une autre icône byzantine illustrant l'Assomption, qui provient d'al-Mu'allaba et qui est conservée au Musée Copte, non seulement le diadème des anges mais également leurs ailes, rouges et noires, peuvent être comparés à celles des anges du ciborium sud⁵³.

L'étude iconographique des ciboria d'al-Mu'allaba reste bien entendue inachevée dans la mesure où leur restauration est en cours. Si la discussion n'en est qu'à ses prémices concernant leur datation, l'on peut néanmoins suggérer une première conclusion à leur égard. Dans l'hypothèse où ils seraient médiévaux, avec une préférence pour le XIII^e-XIV^e siècle, ils adopteraient alors déjà, à quelques détails près, l'iconographie-type des ciboria du XVIII^e-XIX^e siècle. Bien qu'il ne s'agisse certes pas d'une iconographie novatrice, l'on pourrait alors déduire que, lorsqu'elle est utilisée au XVIII^e siècle, celle-ci ne serait donc pas exclusivement inspirée du programme peint des sanctuaires, mais aurait été adoptée, directement sur les ciboria, dès l'époque médiévale. Les exemples d'al-Mu'allaba illustreraient ainsi l'une des origines de la formation de l'iconographie des ciboria plus récents.

CONCLUSION

Par la présente étude, nous avons tenté de mettre en valeur le riche patrimoine iconographique qui est encore préservé dans les églises coptes, diffusé par le biais, non seulement des icônes, mais également du mobilier liturgique et en l'occurrence des ciboria. La présence régulière du ciborium dans les églises et le traitement dont il bénéficie, sont deux facteurs qui renforcent l'importance d'un tel objet dans la liturgie copte. De manière plus générale, la confrontation entre ciboria et icônes a démontré que les ateliers de peinture étendent leur activité non seulement au «support icône», mais également au «support ciborium». Le ciborium n'est d'ailleurs pas le seul objet à être à la fois mobilier liturgique et support d'une décoration peinte, puisqu'il existe également plusieurs exemples de tabernacles peints par Yuhanna et Anastasi. Ce dernier est aussi l'auteur de fresques dans le haykal d'Abu Saifein. Le champ d'activité de ces ateliers ne s'est donc résolument pas limité aux seules icônes.

⁵⁰ Manafis 1990, 170, no. 41.

⁵¹ Bolman 2002, 130, Fig. 8.6.

⁵² Skalova / Gabra 2003, 180-181, no. 9, 184-185, no. 10.

⁵³ Skalova / Gabra 2003, 196-197, no. 15; inv. no. 3370.

LISTE DES CIBORIA MENTIONNÉS

Ciborium attribué à Mattary:

- *Abu Saifein* (Deir Abu Saifein), Le Caire: sanctuaire supérieur de la chapelle Mar Jacoub.

Ciboria attribués à l'atelier d'Ibrahim et Yuhanna:

- *Haret Zuweyla* (al-Khorunfish), Le Caire: sanctuaire principal.
- *Abu Saifein* (Deir Abu Saifein), Le Caire: sanctuaire principal.
- *Abu Sarga* (Masr al-Qadima), Le Caire: sanctuaire principal.
- *Mari Mina* (Fom al-Khalig), Le Caire: sanctuaire principal et sanctuaire de Mar Behnam.

Ciboria attribués au «style de la région d'Akhmim»:

- *Deir Anba Thomas*: à l'origine dans le sanctuaire principal.
- *Deir Anba Bakhum et sa sœur Dalusham* (Sawama) : sanctuaire principal.
- *Abu Saifein* (Akhmim): sanctuaire principal.
- *Deir al-Malak* (al-Salamuni): sanctuaire principal.

Ciboria attribués à Anastasi et à «l'école de Jérusalem»:

- *Al-Adra al-Damshiriyah* (Deir Abu Saifein), Le Caire: sanctuaire principal.
- *Al-Adra in Haret ar-Rum* (Caire Islamique), Le Caire: sanctuaire principal.
- *Al-Adra* (Babylon ad-Darag), Le Caire: sanctuaire principal.

Ciboria d'origine byzantine?:

- *Al-Muallaga* (Masr al-Qadima), Le Caire: dans chacun des trois sanctuaires de l'église principale.

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ORIGINE DES PLANCHES

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La frise des saints de l'église rupestre de Deir Abou Hennis

Gertrud J.M. VAN LOON, Alain DELATTRE

1. INTRODUCTION

L'église rupestre de Deir Abou Hennis est située dans une carrière pharaonique du Nouvel Empire, sur la rive droite du Nil, près de l'ancienne ville d'Antinoé¹. Elle fait partie d'un ensemble d'ermitages installés dans les carrières. Le site est connu par les peintures murales de l'église et les inscriptions du site. Ces dernières sont pour la plupart rédigées en grec et en copte, mais on compte également une vingtaine de textes arabes, ainsi que quelques inscriptions en syriaque et en guèze. Une partie des inscriptions a été publiée, mais les éditions peuvent souvent être améliorées et il reste encore de nombreux textes inédits².

L'église est orientée vers le nord, comme l'impose la situation naturelle du site; elle se compose d'une nef avec sanctuaire, d'un narthex et d'un baptistère. Les murs étaient décorés de peintures murales qui sont traditionnellement datées des VI^e-VIII^e siècles. La série de peintures narratives de l'enfance du Christ dans le narthex (fig. 1.2), le médaillon avec saint Collouthos dans l'église proprement dite (fig. 1.3) et les Noces de Cana, la Résurrection de Lazare et le cycle de l'enfance de saint Jean Baptiste dans le baptistère (fig. 1.5-7) sont les scènes les mieux connues. Elles sont très endommagées, mais les vestiges conservés n'en constituent pas moins un ensemble iconographique de première importance³.

Plusieurs inscriptions suggèrent que l'église était consacrée à saint Jean Baptiste. Par exemple, l'inscription peinte sur le mur de séparation entre le narthex et le baptistère (paroi est), commence par ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΜΦΑΓΙ(ΟC) ΙΩ^α ΠΒΑΠΤΙCΤΗC «Dieu de saint Jean Baptiste»⁴. Cette expression montre que Jean Baptiste était particulièrement honoré à Deir Abou Hennis, ce que confirme l'iconographie, qui fait la part belle aux représentations de la vie de ce saint⁵.

Le présent article est consacré à un ensemble de peintures murales peu connues. Il s'agit d'une série

de saints en pied qui se trouvent sur le mur ouest du narthex (fig 1.1, fig. 4-5). La scène se compose de deux groupes de saints placés de part et d'autre d'un saint orant. Tous les personnages sont nimbés et sont séparés par de petits arbres. Au-dessus de leurs auréoles se trouvaient leurs noms, dont seulement quelques-uns sont conservés. Une frise végétale décore le haut de la paroi et le plafond. La scène est fort endommagée, mais néanmoins très intéressante. Après un bref résumé des recherches sur les peintures du mur ouest, nous présenterons les personnages, sur le plan iconographique et épigraphique, et proposerons une interprétation de cette composition⁶.

¹ Sur le site de Deir Abou Hennis, cf. Timm 1985, 577-585; Coquin / Martin / Grossmann 1991.

² Pour l'histoire de l'étude des inscriptions et des peintures, voir Van Loon / Delattre, à paraître.

³ Van Loon / Delattre, à paraître, est consacré au cycle de l'enfance du Christ dans le narthex. Les cycles de l'enfance du Christ et de Saint-Jean Baptiste de cette église font partie du projet de recherche de Gertrud van Loon, "Early Coptic Cycles of the Infancy of Christ and Saint John the Baptist. Iconological Studies", Université de Leyde. Par ailleurs, les peintures des chapelles XXX et LI à Baouît et les scènes de l'église de Karm al-Ahbariya près d'Abou Ména, font aussi l'objet de ces recherches. Le projet est soutenu par l'Organisation Néerlandaise pour la Recherche Scientifique.

⁴ Clédât en a reproduit le texte en fac-similé (Clédât 1902, 57, n° 18). Trois autres inscriptions du site mentionnent cette expression. Une d'entre elles a été abondamment publiée (Sayce 1886, 178-179; Clédât 1902, 57, n° 19; Leclercq 1907, col. 2353-2354; Jarry 1971/72, 76); les deux autres sont encore inédites. Doresse a déduit de ces inscriptions que Jean Baptiste était le patron de l'église et du village, mais qu'une partie de l'église était dédiée à saint Collouthos (Doresse 2000, II¹, 470).

⁵ À titre de comparaison, on trouve à Baouît plusieurs inscriptions adressées au «Dieu de saint Apa Apollô», cf. p. ex. Clédât 1904/06, 84; Clédât 1916, 9; 44; Clédât 1999, 64.

⁶ Le volet iconographique du travail est dû à Gertrud van Loon; la partie épigraphique à Alain Delattre. Nous remercions Jacques van der Vliet (Université de Leyde) qui a eu la gentillesse de relire cet article et de nous faire bénéficier de ses remarques et avis.

2. HISTOIRE DE RECHERCHES

Les fameux voyageurs du XVII^e et du XVIII^e siècles qui ont visité le Deir Abou Hennis, le dominicain Jean Michel Vansleb (Johann Michael Wansleben) et le jésuite Claude Sicard, n'ont pas mentionné les saints du narthex⁷. Leur existence a été dévoilée par Jean Clédat, qui publia en 1902 des aquarelles des peintures de l'église, accompagnées d'une description. À ce moment déjà, «Le tableau ... était trop mutilé, pour permettre d'en prendre copie, quelques vagues figures grattées, des épaules et c'est tout. Tous les personnages étaient nimbés. L'état de cette peinture est tel que je n'ai pu en fixer le début ni la fin. Ce qui reste du tableau forme un ensemble de douze personnages, dont le septième a les deux mains relevées de chaque côté de la tête, dans la position des orantes». Clédat a également copié les fragments de leurs noms, écrits au-dessus des nimbes⁸.

Dans son journal de voyage publié en 1914, Johann Georg, Duc de Saxe, a décrit la scène comme «eine Reihe von etwa zehn Heiligen, die wohl alle anachoreten sind»⁹. Dans sa thèse de doctorat de 1971, parue en 2000, Jean Doresse disait simplement que «il faut s'en tenir aux observations de Clédat plutôt qu'à ce qui subsiste actuellement»¹⁰. En 1998, Nicole Thierry a publié un article décrivant les peintures de l'église les plus importantes. L'article se base sur les notes prises lors d'une visite en 1976 et la localisation de la série de saints n'est pas tout à fait exacte. Mme Thierry décrit «un groupe d'évêques reconnaissables à leur omophorion et au livre qu'ils portent de la main gauche. Ils encadrent un saint orant dont le visage allongé, la barbe brune, la che-

velure étalée jusqu'aux épaules et le manteau de poils fermé sur la poitrine évoquent la typologie de Jean Baptiste». À gauche du saint orant, elle a pu identifier «Apa Makarios». Une photographie illustrant le texte a permis de faire connaître le saint orant, jusque-là inédit¹¹. Enfin, il faut encore mentionner l'ouvrage *Images de l'Égypte chrétienne*, paru en 2003, qui contient une description générale de l'église et des peintures avec de belles illustrations. Deux photographies présentent le saint orant ainsi que saint Macaire et son voisin saint Arsène¹².

Les photographies d'Abou Hennis, encore inédites, de la collection de l'historien d'art américain Arthur Kingsley Porter († 1933), conservées à la Fine Arts Library de l'Université de Harvard, apportent une aide précieuse à l'étude de la frise des saints. Deux photographies montrent en effet une partie de la paroi avec les saints (fig. 2-3): le saint orant du centre, quatre de ses compagnons de gauche et trois à droite. Il n'a pas été possible jusqu'à présent de découvrir quand le professeur Porter a visité l'Égypte. Les articles biographiques consultés ne mentionnent pas ce voyage¹³, qui eut lieu probablement pendant les années 1920, lorsque Porter s'intéressait à l'art irlandais (et qu'il envisageait sa possible relation avec l'art copte)¹⁴.

La présente étude se base sur la documentation épigraphique de Clédat, les photographies de Porter et la documentation photographique et épigraphique d'une mission de l'université d'Helsinki, effectuée en 1978 sous la direction de Rostislav Holthoer. C'était la première fois que l'église rupestre de Deir Abou Hennis et les ermitages faisaient l'objet d'une étude systématique. L'équipe finlandaise a photographié et a fait des relevés des peintures ainsi que des inscriptions et des graffitis. Des plans de l'église et de la carrière ont été dessinés et une étude géologique des environs a été réalisée. Holthoer est décédé en 1997, et, en raison de diverses circonstances, il n'a jamais publié les résultats de ces recherches. Les archives de la mission sont aujourd'hui en possession de la Société d'Égyptologie finlandaise. Pour cette étude (ainsi que pour le projet de recherche de G.J.M. van Loon), la Société d'Égyptologie finlandaise a généreusement mis à notre disposition les archives de Holthoer.

Nous avons eu la chance de compléter ce dossier par des observations faites sur le site lors d'un séjour en mai 2004¹⁵.

⁷ Vansleb (Wansleben) 1677, 385; Sicard (Martin) 1982, 84.

⁸ Clédat 1902, notamment 51-52. La description est reprise par Leclercq 1907, col. 2349.

⁹ Johann Georg, Duc de Saxe 1914, 43.

¹⁰ Doresse 2000, II¹, 469.

¹¹ Thierry 1998, 5-7 et fig. 33.

¹² Zibawi 2003, 63-64 et fig. 64-65.

¹³ Porter, L. 1939; Seidel 2000.

¹⁴ En 1929, il publia «An Egyptian Legend in Ireland» contenant deux photographies des peintures de l'église d'Abou Macaire à Deir Abou Macaire (Ouadi Natroun; Porter, A.K. 1929, fig. 8-9).

¹⁵ Notre mission à Abou Hennis faisait partie de la mission archéologique à Deir al-Barsha de la K.U.Leuven, dirigée par le professeur H. Willems, auquel va toute notre reconnaissance. Nous remercions également M. Ashraf Rashad Youssif Daker, inspecteur du SCA, qui nous a accompagné sur le site pendant notre séjour.

3. DESCRIPTION DES SAINTS

3.1. Introduction

Le narthex de l'église est situé au sud-est de la carrière. Il s'agit d'un espace presque carré, avec une entrée au sud, divisée en deux parties par un pilier naturel. Actuellement, un mur moderne a condamné l'ouverture ouest, et à l'est une porte grillagée ferme l'entrée.

La paroi ouest du narthex mesure environ 6,50 mètres de long. Sa hauteur diffère notablement: au nord, elle mesure environ 2,75 mètres, tandis qu'au sud, en raison d'une épaisseur du rocher, elle ne mesure que 2,45 mètres environ.

Deux ouvertures ont été creusées dans la paroi, après que la décoration picturale a été achevée. Au sud du mur, une fenêtre s'ouvre sur le baptistère, qui se trouve à l'ouest du narthex. Au milieu de la paroi, une ouverture carrée mène à un petit corridor qui s'ouvre sur les fonts baptismaux (fig. 4-5). On peut diviser la composition de la scène en trois parties. Au centre du tableau, un saint orant est accompagné par six personnages, trois de chaque côté. Plus au nord, on distingue des fragments de trois saints dont les noms sont conservés. Au sud, des petites traces indiquent la présence de quatre autres personnages. Les peintures se trouvent sur la première couche de plâtre. Tous les saints sont peints au même niveau, mais ceux du nord et du sud sont plus petits que le saint orant et ses six compagnons du centre. Les saints sont munis d'un nimbe ocre jaune dont les contours sont rouge foncé. Ils sont séparés par de petits arbres avec deux branches longues à feuillage plumeux peints en ocre jaune et rouge, rehaussé de noir et plus ou moins bien conservés. Une frise végétale peinte dans les mêmes tons surmonte le tableau. La frise s'adapte à la hauteur de la paroi: au nord, elle est placée en haut de la paroi; au milieu elle est partiellement peinte sur le plafond; au sud, elle s'y trouve entièrement.

Dans le coin sud-ouest, les fragments de cette frise décorative sont orientés vers le sud et continuent sur le plafond jusqu'au pilier, parallèlement au mur sud moderne. À l'origine, il y avait donc un mur au sud qui lui aussi était décoré de peintures. En conséquence, le cortège des saints comptait probablement quelques personnages de plus.

L'identification des saints pose de nombreux problèmes. Seules quelques inscriptions au-dessus des nimbes sont encore bien lisibles. Elles permettent d'identifier les trois saints de droite (Côme, Damien et Domèce) ainsi que les deux saints de gauche du tableau principal (Arsène et Macaire). Pour le reste, les inscriptions ne permettent pas d'identifier avec certitude les personnages. Nous présentons ici l'édition des inscriptions placées au-dessus des quatorze personnages de la paroi ouest (A) et une description de la représentation (B). L'ordre de présentation part du sud jusqu'au nord (soit de gauche à droite). La description se base sur les photographies de Porter (qui sont antérieures à 1933) et la documentation de la mission finlandaise de 1978. Entre ces deux visites, la situation des peintures du mur ouest n'a pas beaucoup changé. Nous avons par contre constaté lors de notre mission en mai 2004 que quelques personnages avaient souffert depuis 1978 (un commentaire le signalera dans la description). Les illustrations sont tirées de la documentation de la mission finlandaise (exception faite de quelques vues de détails).

La quatrième section (discussion iconographique) rassemblera diverses remarques iconographiques générales ainsi qu'une discussion sur les saints.

3.2. Présentation du cortège

1. Personnage non identifié

A. Pas de trace d'inscription.

B. Il ne reste du personnage qu'un petit fragment de couleur rouge, peut-être une partie du contour du nimbe.

2. Personnage non identifié

A. Une petite trace au-dessus du nimbe du personnage est encore visible.

[]. []

B. La partie gauche du nimbe est conservée.

3. Saint non identifié (fig. 6)

A. (27x 2 cm). Le nom du saint n'est pas conservé. La titulature commence par **Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ**, comme dans les inscriptions 12 à 14.

Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ]

«Le saint...»

B. Pas de traces de peinture. La fenêtre du baptistère a détruit le personnage.

4. Frère Patermouté (fig. 7)

A. (13 x 3,5 cm). Les deux lignes de l'inscription sont placées à gauche du personnage. Le texte a été publié par Clédar¹⁶, qui y voyait le nom Patermouté¹⁷.

ΠΑΣΟΝ Π . [] ΜΟΥΤΕ

«Frère Patermouté (?)»

B. Le nimbe ocre jaune et une partie de cheveux bruns, le visage avec une partie de l'œil et le sourcil droit sont conservés. Le nimbe touche le plafond et l'inscription est donc placée à gauche du personnage.

5. Saint Arsène (fig. 8)

A. (18,5 x 5 cm). Cette inscription a été publiée par Clédar¹⁸. L'interprétation de la seconde ligne est encore ouverte: on s'attend à trouver une précision sur Arsène (peut-être le saint scétiote), mais aucune ne paraît convenir.

Α[ΠΑ Α]ΡΣΕΝΙ | [ΟΣ] . ΤΕ

Ι Α[ΠΑ Α]ΡΣΕΝΙ:] ΣΕΝΙ Clédar

«Ara Arsénios...»

B. Il ne reste que le haut du corps de saint Arsène. La face est détruite, mais le nimbe, les contours de la tête, les oreilles, une trace de l'œil gauche, les cheveux et la longue barbe gris blanc, taillée en pointe, sont bien visibles. Le personnage fait un geste de bénédiction avec la main droite. La main gauche est placée sur la poitrine et tient peut-être un objet. Il est vêtu d'un vêtement long (orange jaune), avec une pèlerine (ou un mantelet) couvrant les épaules et fermée sur la poitrine¹⁹. La pèlerine est jaune, décorée de deux petites croix noires.

6. Saint Macaire le grand (fig. 8)

A. (26 x 2,5 cm). Le texte a été publié par Sayce²⁰ et par Clédar²¹. La fin de la deuxième ligne se termine par une croix, suivie de quelques traits indéchiffrables.

ΑΠΑ ΜΑΚΑΡΙΟ ΠΝΟΒ | ΝΤΕΩΙ[Η]Τ +...

Ι ΑΠΑ ΜΑΚΑΡΙΟ ΠΝΟΒ: ΑΠΑΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΠΝΟΒ Sayce;
ΑΠΑΜ[.]ΑΡΙΟΠΝΟΒ Clédar **2 ΝΤΕΩΙ[Η]Τ +...: ΝΤΕΩ**
... Τ† Sayce; **ΝΤΕΩ[.]+Ι** Clédar

«Ara Makarios le grand de Scété...»

B. Saint Macaire est conservé jusqu'aux épaules. La face est détruite, mais le nimbe, les contours de la tête, les cheveux et la barbe gris blanc, taillée en pointe, sont conservés. Il est vêtu d'un vêtement rouge foncé. Une petite partie de l'épaule gauche et quelques fragments plus bas ainsi qu'un mantelet jaune orné de deux croix noires sont encore visibles.

7. Personnage non identifié (fig. 9)

A. (5,5 x 3,5 cm). Le texte a été publié par Clédar²².

[]ΠΟΣ | [] . ΠΟΣ

La double séquence **-ΠΟΣ** conservée suggère qu'il pourrait peut-être s'agir d'un évêque ou d'un archevêque (**ΠΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ** ou **ΠΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ**), à moins que ce ne soit la fin d'un nom propre (p. ex. **ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΣ**).

¹⁶ Clédar 1902, 51, n° 12; repris dans *SB Kopt.* I 306, 12.

¹⁷ On pourrait aussi envisager de lire le nom, rare, "Pamouté" (cf. Papaconstantinou 2001, 164).

¹⁸ Clédar 1902, 51, n° 11, repris dans *SB Kopt.* I 306, 11.

¹⁹ Innemée 1992, 105.

²⁰ Sayce 1886, 179, n. 3. Il faut noter que Sayce s'est apparemment trompé dans ses notes, puisqu'il indique que l'inscription est «engraved near an effaced inscription in large Greek capitals», or l'inscription est peinte.

²¹ Clédar 1902, 51, n° 10, repris dans *SB Kopt.* I 306, 10.

²² Clédar 1902, 51, n° 8, repris dans *SB Kopt.* I 306, 8.

B. Ce personnage anonyme est muni d'un nimbe, dont seulement la partie droite est conservée. Il porte une barbe gris blanc, taillée en pointe; la tête est complètement détruite. Comme saint Arsène et saint Macaire, il est vêtu d'un vêtement ocre jaune orange, dont une petite partie est visible, et d'un mantelet jaune, décorée avec deux petites croix noires. À droite, une partie d'un objet et plus bas des plis d'étoffe indiquent que le saint tenait quelque chose dans la main gauche. La main était probablement couverte par les plis du vêtement.

8. Le saint orant (fig. 9)

A. (6,5 x 4 cm). Le texte a été publié par Clédat²³.

+OC ϣ[] | τ[]

1 +OC ϣ: +OCO[Clédat 2 τ[: z[Clédat

Le personnage central est mis en vedette au sein du groupe. Sa position et son costume le distinguent des autres saints de la scène. L'iconographie permet de proposer qu'il s'agit de Jean Baptiste. Dans cette hypothèse, on pourrait penser p. ex. à ϣ [ΑΓΙΟΣ ΙΩΖΑΝΝΗΣ ΠΑΠ] | Τ[ΙΣΤΗΣ]. La séquence initiale +OC pose problème²⁴. L'inscription placée au-dessus du personnage situé à droite commence de la même manière.

B. Une partie du nimbe du saint orant est visible. La face est détruite. Ses longs cheveux bruns lui tombent sur les épaules et sa barbe brune est taillée en pointe. Il porte une tunique orange jaune avec une ceinture aux hanches et un manteau en poils (de couleur ocre jaune), fermé sur la poitrine par une grosse fibule ronde. Les contours et les détails du manteau sont peints en rouge foncé. La partie inférieure du corps a disparu (excepté quelques fragments de la tunique).

La partie droite du manteau, à hauteur de la poitrine, est plus abîmée aujourd'hui qu'en 1978 (lorsque fut prise la photographie fig. 9).

9. Personnage non identifié (fig. 10)

A. (30,5 x 5 cm). Le texte a été publié par Clédat²⁵.

+ o[c] | πe[] ... [.] +

1 +o[c: τγ Clédat

L'identification du personnage n'est pas possible, malgré les traces visibles à la deuxième ligne.

B. Le nimbe ainsi qu'un petit fragment de la tête, les épaules et la partie gauche du corps sont conservés. On peut encore distinguer les restes du mantelet jaune avec les croix. Plus bas, il y a encore de petits fragments en rouge foncé (parties du vêtement).

10. Personnage non identifié (fig. 10)

A. (24,5 x 5 cm). Le texte, publié par Clédat²⁶, n'est conservé que dans sa partie gauche.

απα [] | τ[]

«Apa...»

Le personnage représenté est probablement un moine, comme le suggère le mot **απα**, employé aussi pour Macaire (inscription 6).

B. On peut voir des traces du nimbe et de l'épaule gauche du personnage.

11. Personnage non identifié (fig. 10)

A. (25,5 x 4,5 cm). Le texte a été publié par Clédat²⁷, qui n'a lu que la partie droite de l'inscription. À gauche, on peut encore voir les restes d'un **α** effacé, sans doute le début de **απα**.

α[πα] . ογ[] .

«Apa...»

²³ Clédat 1902, 51, n° 7, repris dans *SB Kopt.* I 306, 7.

²⁴ Il est possible que l'auteur de l'inscription ait machinalement ajouté -OC après la croix par habitude de l'abréviation *stauros* (C+OC), mais peut-être sans vouloir vraiment utiliser cette abréviation. Cette idée nous a été aimablement suggérée par Jacques van der Vliet.

²⁵ Clédat 1902, 51, n° 1, repris dans *SB Kopt.* I 306, 1.

²⁶ Clédat 1902, 51, n° 2, repris dans *SB Kopt.* I 306, 2.

²⁷ Clédat 1902, 51, n° 3, repris dans *SB Kopt.* I 306, 3.

B. Le nimbe, la partie haute de la tête et de l'épaule gauche (avec le mantelet orné d'une croix), ainsi que les traces des cheveux et d'une barbe gris blanc, taillée en pointe, sont encore visibles. Une ligne verticale devant son épaule gauche représente peut-être un bâton. Le personnage porte visiblement un vêtement ocre rouge foncé.

12. Saint Côme (fig. 11)

A. (28 x 3 cm). Le texte de l'inscription a été publié par Sayce²⁸ et par Clédat²⁹.

Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΚΟΣΜΑΣ

ΚΟΣΜΑΣ: ΚΟΣΜΑ Clédat

«Le saint Kosmas»

B. Le saint est conservé jusqu'à la taille. La partie droite du nimbe est visible. Le visage est complètement détruit: seul subsiste un petit fragment d'une courte barbe et du cou. Il est vêtu d'une tunique ocre rouge foncé et d'un *pallium* ocre jaune couvrant son épaule gauche. Soit le *pallium* est tourné autour de la taille, soit il couvre le bras gauche plié³⁰. La main n'est pas visible. Aujourd'hui, une partie du nimbe est détruite.

13. Saint Damien (fig. 11)

A. (32 x 5 cm). Le texte de l'inscription a été publié par Sayce³¹ et par Clédat³².

Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΤΑΜΙΑΝΟΣ

ΤΑΜΙΑΝΟΣ: Νταμίανος Sayce

²⁸ Sayce 1886, 177.

²⁹ Clédat 1902, 51, n° 4, repris dans *SB Kopt.* I 306, 4.

³⁰ Pour des exemples, voir 4.5, l'iconographie des saints Côme et Damien.

³¹ Sayce 1886, 177.

³² Clédat 1902, 51, n° 5, repris dans *SB Kopt.* I 306, 5.

³³ Sayce 1886, 177.

³⁴ Clédat 1902, 51, n° 6, repris dans *SB Kopt.* I 306, 6.

³⁵ Nous remercions K.N. Ciggaar (Leyde), L. Van Rompay (Duke University) et J. van der Vliet qui nous ont indiqué plusieurs références bibliographiques.

«Le saint Damianos».

B. Le nimbe, quelques traces de cheveux bruns et une partie du contour de son épaule droite (ocre rouge) sont les seuls éléments conservés.

14. Saint Domèce (fig. 11)

A. (28 x 3 cm). Ce texte a été publié par Sayce³³ et par Clédat³⁴. On notera que l'inscription était mieux conservée au temps de Clédat, qui a lu: [Ι]ΓΙΟΣ ΔΟΜΙ[Ι]ΤΙΟΣ. En 1978, trois lettres avaient disparu ([Ο ΑΓΙΟ]ς ΔΟΜΗΤΙΟΣ sur les photographies de la mission finlandaise). Actuellement, suite à la perte d'une partie du plâtre, on ne peut plus lire que les quatre dernières lettres ([Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΔΟΜΗ]ΤΙΟΣ).

[Ο ΑΓΙΟ]ς ΔΟΜΗΤΙΟΣ

1 [Ο ΑΓΙΟ]ς ΔΟΜΗΤΙΟΣ: [Ι]ΓΙΟΣ ΔΟΜΙ . ΤΙΟΣ
Clédat

«Le saint Domètios».

B. Pas de trace de peinture.

4. DISCUSSION ICONOGRAPHIQUE

Comme le montre l'édition des inscriptions, l'identification des personnages est difficile. Johann Georg y voyait des anachorètes, tandis que Nicole Thierry y voyait un groupe d'évêques. Pour le tableau central, l'identification d'Arsène et de Macaire, et la séquence ΑΠΑ... au début des inscriptions 10 et 11 vont dans le sens de la première hypothèse. Mais, comme il a été indiqué plus haut, l'inscription 7 pourrait désigner un évêque. Deux des trois personnages de droite sont des saints médecins; les quatre personnages de gauche comprennent un frère et un saint (il n'est pas possible d'identifier les deux autres). Il ne s'agit donc pas d'un groupe homogène. Les paragraphes qui suivent proposent une étude iconographique des personnages identifiés ainsi que quelques remarques sur les personnages qui ne le sont pas³⁵.

4.1. Frère Patermouté

Patermouté est le seul personnage de la série qui est présenté comme un frère (ΠΑCΩΝ). Ce titre ne

s'utilise pas pour des saints³⁶, mais pour des moines³⁷. Nous aurions donc ici apparemment un frère de la laure de Deir Abou Hennis³⁸.

Il a des cheveux bruns, contrairement aux moines du tableau central qui sont représentés comme des vieillards avec des cheveux et une barbe gris blanc. La présence d'un moine au milieu des saints peut sembler étonnante, mais elle trouve des parallèles, notamment à Baouît³⁹.

4.2. Saint Arsène

L'identification d'Arsène est problématique. Il existe en effet plusieurs personnages de ce nom. La proximité d'Arsène avec Macaire le Grand tend à indiquer que nous avons ici affaire au saint scétiote. Ce père du désert (ca 350-445) fut précepteur du fils de l'empereur Théodose avant de se retirer à Scété. Il est fêté le 13 Pachôn/8 mai⁴⁰. À notre connaissance, aucune représentation de saint Arsène de Scété n'est conservée.

En revanche, il faut noter que ce saint porte un vêtement long avec un mantelet qui couvre les épaules et est fermé sur la poitrine, élément typique du costume pachômien⁴¹. Il n'est donc pas impossible qu'il s'agisse d'un saint local, même si Macaire, dont l'origine scétiote est précisée dans l'inscription, porte des vêtements identiques.

4.3. Saint Macaire de Scété

L'identification du personnage est certaine grâce à l'inscription qui le surmonte. Il s'agit du célèbre père du désert de Scété (ca 300-390), fêté le 27 Phaménôth/23 mars⁴². Comme saint Arsène, il porte le mantelet pachômien.

Quelques représentations d'un saint Macaire sont attestées, à Saqqarah notamment⁴³, mais il n'est pas sûr qu'il s'agisse de saint Macaire le Grand de Scété.

4.4. Le saint orant: Saint Jean Baptiste?

L'inscription accompagnant le personnage est très abîmée et ne permet pas d'identifier le saint orant. Selon Nicole Thierry, les caractéristiques du personnage (la barbe et la chevelure, la tunique avec ceinture et le manteau de poils) «évoquent la typologie de Jean Baptiste»⁴⁴.

La tunique avec ceinture et le manteau en poils sont les attributs d'un ermite du désert comme Jean Baptiste ou le prophète Elie. C'est en effet le

costume d'Elie dans la grande mosaïque de la Transfiguration dans l'abside de l'église de sainte Catherine au Sinaï ou celui de Jean Baptiste sur une icône provenant du Sinaï et conservée à Kiev (tous les deux du VI^e siècle)⁴⁵.

On trouve dans l'église d'Abou Hennis une peinture qui apporte une confirmation à l'identification du saint orant avec Jean Baptiste. Sur la paroi est de l'église proprement dite, il y a des fragments de trois personnages nimbés, séparés par des petits arbres: le Christ, identifiable grâce au nimbe crucifère, lève son bras droit. Il est accompagné à sa gauche par saint Zacharie dont seuls l'inscription et des petits fragments du nimbe et des vêtements sont conservés. À sa droite, saint Jean Baptiste est identifiable grâce au rouleau qu'il porte dans la main gauche. Le texte du rouleau est suffisamment visible pour y reconnaître le texte de Jean 1: 29 «Voici l'agneau de Dieu, qui enlève le péché du monde» (fig. 1.4 et fig. 12)⁴⁶.

Le Jean Baptiste du mur est porte un nimbe ocre jaune. La partie gauche du personnage est détruite. À droite, des fragments d'une courte barbe brune, taillée en pointe, et de longs cheveux bruns qui lui tombent sur les épaules sont encore visibles. Il porte une tunique orange jaune et un manteau en poils (orange jaune foncé avec des contours et détails en rouge foncé) fermé sur la poitrine par une fibule ronde. Sa ceinture n'est plus visible. Bien que le

³⁶ Il ne s'agirait donc pas de saint Paternouté, originaire d'Oxyrhynchus, honoré par les moines de Baouît et dans les ermitages d'Esna et commémoré le 7 Choïak/3 décembre (Coquin 1991a). On trouve l'histoire de ce saint, ancien brigand devenu ascète, dans l'*Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, rédigée à la fin du IV^e siècle (*Hist. Mon. X*; Festugière 1961; Gasco 1992; Papaconstantinou 2001, 168-170).

³⁷ Sauneron 1972, 53, n. 8.

³⁸ Même si ce nom n'est pas attesté dans les inscriptions de l'église et des ermitages.

³⁹ Dans la chapelle XVII par exemple, on trouve sur la paroi ouest côté à côté des moines (Pathoul, Biktôr), un saint (Philothée) et le roi David (Clédât 1904/06, 79).

⁴⁰ Regnault 1991.

⁴¹ Innemée 1992, 105.

⁴² Guillaumont 1991.

⁴³ Couvent de saint Jérémie, cellule A, fin du VI^e-VII^e siècle (Quibell 1907, 64 et pl. XLIV; Rassart-Debergh/Debergh 1981, 187-192; Wietheger 1992, 58-60, 74; Zibawi 2003, fig. 96).

⁴⁴ Thierry 1998, 5.

⁴⁵ Weitzmann 1976, 32-35 et planches XIV et LVII; Forsyth / Weitzmann 1973: pl. CXLII.

⁴⁶ Thierry 1998, 13. La localisation est incorrecte.

manteau en poils soit moins détaillé, les cheveux et les vêtements sont du même style et sont exécutés dans la même palette de couleurs que celles du saint orant du narthex.

Même si les fragments de l'inscription sont d'interprétation particulièrement malaisée, nous proposons d'identifier le saint orant du narthex à Jean Baptiste, ce que confirme l'iconographie du personnage au sein même de l'église ainsi que le fait que l'église lui est probablement dédiée.

Depuis l'époque paléochrétienne, saint Jean Baptiste est représenté avec de longs cheveux bruns qui lui tombent sur les épaules et une barbe taillée en pointe. Il est vêtu d'une tunique et d'un *pallium* (dans la plupart des représentations du Baptême du Christ, par exemple). Lorsqu'il est représenté seul, il porte, comme un ermite du désert, une tunique avec une ceinture et un manteau en poils ou bien une combinaison des deux types de vêtements. Ses attributs sont le rouleau, un bâton ou un disque avec l'agneau de Dieu.

L'icône de Kiev, déjà mentionnée, et un panneau de la chaire de Maximien à Ravenne (vers 545) illustrent le type «ermite»⁴⁷. En Égypte, on en trouve des exemples dans l'église du Monastère Rouge à Sohag (semi-dôme sud)⁴⁸, dans le haykal de Benjamin de l'église de Abou Macaire au Deir Abou Macaire (Ouari Natroun; IX^e siècle; fig. 13)⁴⁹ et probablement dans l'église rupestre de Ouadi Sarga, à droite de l'abside est, registre supérieur, le

personnage à gauche (VII^e-VIII^e siècles?)⁵⁰. Dans une lunette de la chapelle XXXII à Baouît, saint Jean Baptiste est représenté en buste⁵¹.

Jean Baptiste, le précurseur du Christ, est un saint très honoré par l'église copte. Son ascétisme en fait un modèle pour les moines: avec le prophète Élie il est l'exemple par excellence de la vie monastique. Son culte est attesté depuis la fin du V^e siècle (mais il est probablement plus ancien). Le synaxaire note sa naissance (30 Pauni/24 juin), son exécution (2 Thôth/30 août), l'invention de sa tête et de ses ossements (30 Mécheir/24 février et 2 Pauni/27 mai), ainsi que de nombreuses fêtes où il joue un rôle indirect. La tradition littéraire qui lui est consacrée est riche et diverse; elle comprend des *vitae*, des homélies, des doxologies et des hymnes, des textes magiques, des récits de miracles, etc⁵².

4.5. Les saints Côme et Damien

Les saints médecins anargyres syriens Côme et Damien connurent une grande popularité au Proche-Orient et à Rome. Dans l'hagiographie, on distingue trois paires de saints médecins appelés par les mêmes noms, originaire de Pheremma, près de Cyr en Cilicie. Les paires ont leurs propres traditions de légende, qui parfois se mélangent. La tradition copte-arabe parle d'une mère, Théodote, avec cinq fils dont les deux aînés étaient Côme et Damien. Tous ont été martyrisés sous Dioclétien⁵³.

L'église copte commémore la famille le 22 Hathôr/18 novembre, les consécration des églises de Côme et Damien le 22 Pauni/16 juin et le 30 Hathôr/26 novembre et la translation des reliques des saints le 10 Pauni/4 juin⁵⁴. En Égypte, leur culte est attesté depuis le V^e siècle et était «assez florissant, surtout vers la fin du VI^e et le début du VII^e siècle»⁵⁵.

Dans l'église rupestre de Deir Abou Hennis, Côme et Damien faisaient apparemment l'objet d'un culte spécifique. À gauche et au-dessus de Côme ainsi qu'entre les deux frères, on trouve des crochets dans la paroi, qui ont pu servir, par exemple, à suspendre des lampes⁵⁶. De plus, entre les saints, il y a une petite niche.

Les cavités des crochets sont plâtrées et il y a également des traces de plâtre dans la niche. Cela signifie que les crochets et la niche font partie de la composition (ou qu'ils étaient là avant la décoration

⁴⁷ Wessel 1978, 616-618.

⁴⁸ L'église de Anba Bishoi du monastère Rouge a probablement été bâtie dans la seconde moitié du V^e siècle. La datation précise des couches de peintures dans le sanctuaire fait actuellement l'objet de recherches. Pour la datation relative des couches, voir Innemée 2004.

⁴⁹ Zibawi 2003, fig. 122 et 190.

⁵⁰ Doresse 2000 II¹, 394 et II², fig. 33-34.

⁵¹ Paroi nord. Malgré le disque avec l'agneau de Dieu, Clédât identifiait le personnage comme le Christ (Clédât 1916, 14 et pl. VIIIb; Clédât 1999, photo 23). Dans la chapelle XVII (paroi sud, lunette), saint George a la même physionomie: de longs cheveux bruns qui tombent sur les épaules et une courte barbe taillée en pointe (Clédât 1904/06, 78-79 et pl. XLII et XLVIIIb; pour l'identification de ce saint George, voir Leroy 1969, 86).

⁵² Till 1958; Perez 1991; Papaconstantinou 2001, 112-115.

⁵³ Van Esbroeck 1981; Van Esbroeck 1991.

⁵⁴ Van Esbroeck 1981, 72-73; Papaconstantinou 2001, 131.

⁵⁵ Papaconstantinou 2001, 130-131; Cramer 1970.

⁵⁶ On trouve des crochets uniquement près de Côme et Damien et entre saint Arsène et le frère Patermouté.

du mur et qu'ils ont été intégrés dans l'arrangement, ce qui revient au même).

L'important dossier iconographique des frères Côme et Damien témoigne de la popularité dont ils ont joui dans le monde paléochrétien et byzantin. Parmi les exemples les plus connus et les plus anciens, il faut mentionner les mosaïques de l'abside de l'église des saints Côme et Damien à Rome (526-530) et les peintures dans la chapelle des médecins à Santa Maria Antiqua (Rome, environ 705)⁵⁷.

En Égypte, nous avons trouvé cinq attestations des frères médecins plus ou moins contemporaines des peintures d'Abou Hennis. À Baouît, les frères sont peints dans la chapelle XXVIII, à droite de la niche orientale (VI^e-VIII^e siècle?). Ils ont une barbe courte et ils sont vêtus d'une tunique longue avec des manches longues et une *paenula*, une pèlerine coupée en forme de cloche, munie d'une fente pour la tête. Côme porte une tunique blanche et une *paenula* rouge et Damien, selon Clédât, «un vêtement jaune». Dans la main droite, ils tiennent «un volumen enroulé et serré par des liens»⁵⁸. On ne peut en fait déterminer si cet objet est un rouleau ou s'il s'agit d'une trousse de médecin cylindrique en bronze⁵⁹. Une peinture trouvée à Ouadi Sarga dans une maison privée, et maintenant conservée au British Museum, représente Côme et Damien en position d'orants, accompagnés par leur frères Anthimos, Léontios et Euprépios (VI^e siècle?; fig. 14). Comme à Baouît, les saints ont une barbe courte et ils sont vêtus d'une tunique et d'une *paenula*, mais ils portent un sac de médecin au bras droit⁶⁰. Dans l'église de la Vierge au Couvent des Syriens dans le Ouadi Natroun, ils sont peints dans le khurus, sur la paroi sud (vers 700). Ils portent aussi une barbe courte, mais ils sont vêtus d'une tunique et d'un *pallium* (dans les couleurs gris et ocre brun) et tiennent un scalpel, une cuillère ou une spatule dans la main droite et une trousse de médecin dans la main gauche (fig. 15)⁶¹. À l'église de Karm al-Aḥbarīya (près d'Abou Ména) seul le saint Côme, en position d'orant, est conservé (fin du VI^e siècle). La partie inférieure du visage est perdue. Il porte une tunique rouge foncé et un *pallium* brun et il porte un sac au bras gauche⁶². À Alexandrie, dans «la tombe de Wescher» (IV^e-VII^e siècles?), les deux saints étaient peints sur les murs latéraux de l'arcosolium central⁶³. Leur description n'est pas connue.

À Abou Hennis, saint Côme porte probablement une barbe courte (on peut en effet distinguer son cou), comme dans tous les exemples conservés, et il est vêtu d'une tunique et d'un *pallium*, comme au Couvent des Syriens et à Karm al-Aḥbarīya. Comme la peinture de Deir Abou Hennis est fort abîmée, on ne peut déterminer s'il tenait dans la main un objet cylindrique, un sac ou une trousse de médecin. Il est très vraisemblable que Damien avait la même apparence.

4.6. Saint Domèce

L'identité de Domèce pose problème. La peinture du personnage est complètement détruite, et de l'inscription, il ne reste que le nom propre, sans titulature. L'édition de Clédât en 1902 indique cependant que la fin de sa titulature (ΙΡΙΟC pour Ο ΑΡΙΟC) était conservée de son temps. Il s'agit donc d'un saint.

Selon Clédât, il y a deux saints du nom de Domèce, «... l'un fut nommé évêque par Justinien vers l'an 507 ...; le second, qui fut évêque de Métillène, mourut vers 602... Mais je crois qu'il s'agit dans nos représentations du premier Domitien, lequel joua un rôle plus important. Il fut, avec Théodore Askidas, un des propagateurs de l'origénisme, qui se répandit principalement chez les moines de Palestine»⁶⁴. Il serait tout à fait étonnant de retrouver ce personnage ici, aux côtés de saints anciens comme Côme et Damien.

⁵⁷ Skrobucha 1965, 21-26; Chadzinikolaou 1971, col. 1078-1079; Artelt 1974, col. 345; Knipp 2002, 4-5, 10 et fig. 4-5, 8. Selon plusieurs auteurs, la mosaïque de la coupole de l'église de saint George à Thessaloniki (279-395) est la plus ancienne représentation des saints Côme et Damien. W. Eugene Kleinbauer a émis des doutes sur cette identification, avec raison nous semble-t-il (Kleinbauer 1982).

⁵⁸ Clédât 1904/06, 157 et pl. XCVII-2 et pl. C. Selon Skrobucha, on peut interpréter cet objet comme un rouleau parce que les saints ne s'occupaient pas seulement de la santé physique des patients, mais aussi de leur santé psychologique, en leur enseignant la foi en Christ. (Skrobucha 1965, 39; Artelt 1974, col. 346).

⁵⁹ Kolta/Schwarzmann-Schafhauser 2003, 109, avec bibliographie. Il ne s'agit pas à proprement parler d'une trousse, mais plutôt d'une boîte ou d'un coffret.

⁶⁰ BM EA73139; Dalton 1916.

⁶¹ Innemée / Van Rompay / Sobczynski 1999, [16] et ill. 9; Innemée 2001, ill. 1 et 3.

⁶² Witte-Orr (à paraître), 160-161, pl. 8 et pl. 32c. Nous remercions Mme Witte-Orr pour nous avoir donné accès au manuscrit de son livre.

⁶³ Venit 2002, 185.

⁶⁴ Clédât 1902, 51-52.

Le Domèce le plus connu est sans doute le frère de Maxime. Ces fils de l'empereur Valentinien vivaient dans le Ouadi Natroun sous la direction spirituelle de saint Macaire le Grand. Selon la tradition copte, le monastère Deir al-Baramous («monastère des Romains») tire son nom de ces deux princes. Le synaxaire les commémore le 17 Tybi/12 janvier⁶⁵. L'absence de Maxime (et il n'y a plus de place pour lui sur la paroi) rend très hypothétique cette identification.

Il s'agirait donc plutôt d'un troisième personnage, un saint médecin syrien, dont Peeters a étudié l'origine⁶⁶. La présence de ce saint aux côtés de Côme et Damien, également syriens et guérisseurs, est assez logique. Cependant, il faut noter que Domèce n'est pas à notre connaissance attesté dans la littérature ou le calendrier coptes anciens⁶⁷. Il semblerait que l'on ait ici une influence syrienne, que suggère par ailleurs la présence d'une inscription syriaque dans l'église⁶⁸.

En Égypte, aucune représentation de ce saint Domèce n'est connue. La seule comparaison iconographique se trouve à Rome, dans la chapelle des médecins à Santa Maria Antiqua (vers 705). Sur la paroi ouest, un saint guérisseur est identifié par une inscription comme saint Domèce. Le nimbe, une partie du visage, un capuchon monastique et une partie du corps sont conservés. Il portait une trousse de médecin dont quelques traces sont encore visibles⁶⁹.

4.7. Les personnages non identifiés

Sur les quatorze personnages de la paroi ouest du narthex, sept personnes ne peuvent pas être identifiées. Du premier personnage au sud, il ne reste un petit fragment de peinture (n° 1); du deuxième, il ne subsiste qu'une trace de l'inscription et qu'une partie du nimbe. Seul un fragment de l'inscription du troisième personnage est conservé, mais nous pouvons en conclure que le personnage était qualifié de *o arios* «saint», comme les saints Côme, Damien et Domèce.

Les autres personnages non identifiés font partie du tableau central (n° 7 et 9-11). Les fragments conservés de l'inscription 7 pourraient désigner un évêque ou un archevêque. La titulature des n° 10 et 11 commence par «apa». Ce titre, très courant, est utilisé pour désigner Macaire (inscription 6). Il s'agit donc peut-être aussi de moines, mais leurs noms ne sont pas lisibles. Ces quatre personnages portent apparemment le même type de vêtement qu'Arsène et Macaire: une sorte de tunique (rouge foncé ou orange jaune), avec un mantelet décoré de deux croix qui couvre les épaules. Les plis du vêtement du n° 7 indiquent qu'il porte quelque chose dans la main gauche. De même, le n° 11 porte vraisemblablement un bâton. Arsène, Macaire, et les personnages 7 et 11 ont une barbe taillée en pointe (les visages des personnages 9 et 10 sont trop abîmés). Les vêtements et les titulatures conservés tendent donc à indiquer que les six compagnons du saint Jean Baptiste étaient des moines et non des évêques comme le pensait Mme Thierry (voir 2. Histoire de recherches). Le mantelet suggère une origine pachômienne, pourtant infirmée en ce qui concerne Macaire. Il est aussi possible que les saints aient été représentés vêtus du costume monastique local.

5. REMARQUES FINALES

5.1. Les cortèges de saints et la composition de la paroi ouest du narthex à Abou Hennis

Des cortèges de saints sont couramment peints sur les murs des bâtiments monastiques ou des églises, par exemple à Baouît, Saqqarah ou Ouadi Sarga. À Saqqarah, il n'en reste que quelques exemples⁷⁰. Quant au site de Ouadi Sarga, il est assez mal documenté: seules des photographies de l'église avec des séries de saints sur différents registres sont publiées,

⁶⁵ Van Loon 1999, 31 n. 138; Forget 1921/26 I, 353-356; De Lacy O'Leary 1937, 192-194.

⁶⁶ Peeters 1939; Parmentier 1989.

⁶⁷ Selon Mgr. Jacob Muyser un saint syrien (martyr) Mâr Dometios (Dûmit, Dhûmit, Dîmat) est commémoré au 13 Misrâ/6 août (Muyser 1954, 14). Malheureusement, il ne cite pas de référence. Dans le synaxaire actuel de l'église copte, saint Domèce le Syrien est commémoré le 25 Abib/19 juillet (Meinardus 1963/64, 150; Atiya 1991, 2188). Dans la bibliothèque de l'église d'Abou Sargah (Vieux-Caire), un manuscrit arabe du XVII^e siècle contient la vie de saint Dûmat le Perse (Ms. Theol. 19; Khater/Burmester 1977, 46-47, no. 122).

⁶⁸ Clédat 1902, 55, n° 5; Jarry 1971/72, 59-60, n° 9 et 10.

⁶⁹ Knipp 2002, 3 et fig. 4.

⁷⁰ Par exemple dans les cellules A (paroi nord; Quibell 1907, 64 et pl. XLIV) et F (paroi est, niche; Quibell 1907, pl. LIV-LVI), salle 1764, paroi nord (Quibell 1912, pl. VII) et salle 1772 N («réfectoire»), paroi nord (Quibell 1912, pl. X).

mais il est difficile de les étudier et d'identifier les personnages représentés⁷¹. La partie fouillée du monastère d'Apollô à Baouît est la mieux documentée et on y trouve un grand nombre de saints (la discussion se concentrera donc sur ce site)⁷². Cependant, le cortège de saints de Deir Abou Hennis est peint dans le narthex d'une église. Or, les bâtiments de Baouît où les peintures qui nous intéressent ont été découvertes sont désignés comme des «chapelles», des salles ou des cellules (même si la fonction des édifices est souvent inconnue). Quant aux peintures de saints des deux églises de Baouît (nommées église nord et église sud), elles sont trop mutilées et inutilisables pour notre propos⁷³. La comparaison entre les cortèges de divers sites est donc difficile. Nous nous en tiendrons par conséquent à des remarques générales.

À Baouît, les cortèges de saints se composent en général de séries des personnages en pied, portant un livre, un encensoir, une clé, un bâton, un rouleau ou un autre objet, ou bien les mains dans un geste de bénédiction, ou encore en position d'orant. La plupart des personnages sont des moines du couvent (scribes, économes, chantres, portiers etc.), représentés dans une même attitude ou des attitudes variées. Ils sont peints côte à côte ou séparé par de la végétation (des arbres) ou des colonnes et sont vêtus d'une tunique et d'un *pallium* ou d'une (ou deux) tunique(s) avec une écharpe. Bien qu'une partie des cortèges rassemble des personnages dans la même attitude ou semble mélanger arbitrairement des types divers, on trouve aussi des compositions avec un certain rythme. Par exemple dans la salle 40 (paroi nord) du monastère de Baouît, l'archange Uriel se trouve au milieu des saints⁷⁴. Dans les compositions double des niches, la Vierge en orante au milieu des apôtres (et parfois des saints locaux) est peinte dans le registre inférieur, le Christ en majesté dans le registre supérieur⁷⁵. Une célèbre peinture fragmentaire du monastère de Saqqarah, conservée au Musée copte du Caire, représente Apollô en orant entre saint Macaire et apa Amoun. À gauche du saint Macaire, on trouve saint Onnophrios en position d'orant⁷⁶.

La composition de la paroi ouest du narthex de l'église de Deir Abou Hennis semble s'articuler en trois parties. Au sud du mur, il y a des petits fragments de quatre personnages; les inscriptions identifient l'un d'entre eux comme un moine (ΠΑΧΩΝ) et un autre comme un saint (Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ). Le frère a des cheveux bruns. Sept personnages se trouvent au

centre de la paroi. Le groupe est construit autour de Jean Baptiste, qui est entouré par trois personnages de chaque côté, représentés comme des vieillards et vêtus d'une tunique avec un mantelet. Deux hypothèses d'interprétations de cette composition semblent possibles. Soit il s'agit d'un groupe de moines, avec au centre leur précurseur biblique, Jean-Baptiste. Soit la structure est plus complexe, avec deux moines aux extrémités, et trois autres personnages, dont Jean-Baptiste au centre. Les six personnages semblent porter le même type de vêtements, ce qui penche en faveur de la première hypothèse. Les vêtements suggèrent un type pachômien, même si Macaire (ainsi peut-être qu'Arsène) est originaire de Basse-Égypte. On ne trouve pas à Baouît de costume similaire à celui des moines représentés à Deir Abou Hennis, du moins dans l'état actuel des recherches.

La présence de cet élément pachômien dans le costume des moines est difficile à expliquer. La vie monastique dans les carrières d'Abou Hennis ne se prêtait pas à une vie cénobitique fortement organisée; il s'agissait donc sans doute d'une laurie. L'iconographie des costumes des moines pachômiens (Haute-Égypte) et antoniens (Basse-Égypte) ont été étudiés⁷⁷, mais l'étude des vêtements des moines de Moyenne-Égypte n'a jamais fait l'objet d'une telle étude. Des influences du nord et du sud sont envisageables.

⁷¹ Dorese 2000, 2ⁱⁱ, fig. 31-35, 36b-d, 39, 41.

⁷² Voir la bibliographie dans Clédat 1999. On estime que seulement 5 à 10% du monastère ont été fouillés. En 2002, les fouilles ont repris sous l'égide du Louvre et de l'IFAO. En dépit de cette documentation abondante, les cortèges de saints n'ont pas fait l'objet d'étude spécifique.

⁷³ Clédat 1999, photo 196, 198-199; Bénazeth 2002. Dans l'église de Karm al-Ahbariya les séries de saints sont également fragmentaires (Witte-Orr, à paraître).

⁷⁴ Maspero / Drioton 1931/43, pl. XLVIIb, XLVIII-L. On trouve une composition similaire dans la chapelle 1, sud-ouest, paroi est (Palanque 1906, 9-10 et pl. X-XII). On trouve un autre exemple dans la chapelle LVI, paroi ouest: sept moines, deux cavaliers, une sainte en orante, deux cavaliers; paroi nord: moine avec bâton, moine orant, quatre moines avec bâton, moine orant, deux moines avec bâton (Clédat 1999, 156-159, photo 135-141, 144-145).

⁷⁵ Baouît: Chapelle XVII (Clédat 1904/06, pl. XL-XLIb); Chapelle 2 sud-ouest (Palanque 1906, 12-13 et pl. XII-XIII); Salle 20 (Maspero/Drioton 1931/43, pl. XXXI-XXXIII).

⁷⁶ Cellule A, paroi nord (Quibell 1907, 64 et pl. XLIV; Rassart-Debergh/Debergh 1981, 187-192; Wietheger 1992, 58-60, 74; Zibawi 2003, fig. 96).

⁷⁷ Innemée 1992, 90-128.

À Baouît, on trouve souvent un groupe de moines qui entourent leur précurseur, Apollô (le fondateur du monastère), ainsi que Phib et Anoup. La scène est souvent peinte dans une lunette. Les trois saints sont assis sur un siège carré et les autres personnages prennent place des deux côtés. La taille des personnages est adaptée à la hauteur de la lunette⁷⁸. Dans l'état actuel des publications, il ne semble pas y avoir de cortège de saints où Jean-Baptiste occupe une place centrale au milieu de moines. Sa présence à Deir Abou Hennis s'explique sans doute par le fait qu'il est le saint titulaire de l'église.

Plus à droite, au nord du mur ouest du narthex, il y a un ensemble de trois saints médecins, dont Côme et selon toute probabilité aussi Damien, portent une tunique et pallium. La représentation de saint Domèce a entièrement disparu (seule subsiste une partie de l'inscription). Avec saint Collouthos, peint sur le mur est de l'église (fig. 1.3), quatre saints anargyres sont représentés dans l'église rupestre. Les saints Côme et Damien étaient spécialement honorés, comme en témoignent les crochets autour de leur représentation.

On trouve un autre exemple d'une série de saints guérisseurs dans l'église de la Vierge au couvent des Syriens dans le Ouadi Natroun. Dans le khurus, sur le mur sud, on trouve Côme, Damien et un médecin non identifié qui soigne un patient. Sur le mur nord, il y a la représentation de saint Apakyr. Cet ensemble de peintures a probablement été exécuté vers 700⁷⁹.

On peut se demander dans quelle mesure la présence de plusieurs saints médecins indique l'existence d'un centre de culte spécial.

5.2. *Style et date des peintures*

Il est difficile d'analyser le style des saints du mur ouest du narthex. Les visages ont disparu et ce qui reste des vêtements est très fragmentaire. Les personnages sont peints en pied, frontalement, sans beaucoup de mouvement et sans profondeur. Les six compagnons de saint Jean Baptiste au centre de la paroi ont une tête caractéristique: un peu allongée, avec des cheveux courts gris blanc fuyant aux tempes et une longue barbe. D'après ce qui reste des visages on peut voir que les peintures étaient bien détaillées (voir par exemple les cheveux et la barbe).

La palette des couleurs utilisée va de l'ocre jaune orange, au brun noir en passant par le rouge foncé. Une teinte foncée de la couleur indique des plis et des détails des vêtements. Il s'agit des mêmes tons que les scènes du cycle de l'enfance de saint Jean Baptiste dans le baptistère et la peinture du Christ, de Zacharie et de Jean Baptiste qui se trouve dans l'église (mur ouest). Le style de cette peinture est très proche de celles du mur ouest du narthex, notamment en ce qui concerne l'iconographie de Jean Baptiste (voir 4.4, le commentaire sur le saint orant).

La date des peintures est également difficile à déterminer. Les inscriptions ne donnent pas d'indice probant. On peut comparer les visages des vieillards avec celui de l'icône d'apa Abraham, évêque d'Hermonthis (vers 590-600) ou celui de l'abbé Ména de l'icône du «Christ et l'abbé Ména» (fin VI^e-début VII^e siècle)⁸⁰. Les peintures du monastère Rouge à Sohag (les saints en buste dans le sanctuaire)⁸¹ ou celles de certaines chapelles de Baouît⁸² et de Saqqarah⁸³ et peut-être aussi à Ouadi Sarga⁸⁴ offrent également des similitudes. Comme il a déjà été dit plus haut, la datation des peintures du

⁷⁸ Baouît: Chapelle III, paroi nord (Clédat 1904/06, 16-17, pl. XIIa-XIII); Chapelle VII, paroi est (Clédat 1904/06, 38, pl. XXVII); Chapelle XXXIII, paroi nord (Clédat 1916, 17-18); Chapelle XXXV, paroi nord (Clédat 1916, 24, pl. XIV; Clédat 1999, photo 28-32); Chapelle LI, paroi nord, tympan (Clédat 1999, 112-113, photo 105-108).

Dans le monastère d'apa Jérémie à Saqqarah, on trouve (selon toute probabilité) des fragments d'une scène similaire (salle 1764, mur nord; Quibell 1912, pl. VIIa; Rassart-Debergh/Debergh 1981, 201-203; Wietheger 1992, 60-62).

⁷⁹ Innemée / Van Rompay / Sobczynski 1999, [15]-[16] et ill. 8-9; Innemée 2001: ill. 1-3; Innemée / Van Rompay 2002, [5] et ill. 2. La chapelle des médecins à Santa Maria Antiqua à Rome (vers 705; Knipp 2002) offre un exemple célèbre de peintures de saints guérisseurs.

⁸⁰ Berlin, SMB-PK, MSBK 6114; Paris, Louvre E 11565 (Zibawi 2003, fig. 127-128).

⁸¹ Zibawi 2003, fig. 115-123.

⁸² Par exemple dans la chapelle XXVI, paroi ouest (Clédat 1904/06, 135 et pl. LXXXVI-LXXXVII; Clédat 1999, photo 13); Chapelle XVIII, paroi ouest (Clédat 1904/06, 157-158 et pl. CII-CVIII); Chapelle XXXV, paroi nord (Clédat 1999, photo 30-32); Chapelle XLII, niche, paroi est (Clédat 1999, 45-47 et photo 48-51); Chapelle LVI, paroi nord (Clédat 1999: 156-157 et photo 135-137); Chapelle 1 sud-ouest, paroi est (Palanque 1906: 8-9 et pl. VIII-IX); Chapelle 2 sud-ouest, niche (Palanque 1906, 12-13 et pl. XII-XIII); Salle 40, paroi nord (Maspero / Drioton 1931/43, pl. XLVIII-L).

⁸³ Cellule F, paroi est, niche (Quibell 1907, pl. LV).

⁸⁴ Doresse 2000 2ⁱⁱ, fig. 34.

monastère Rouge fait actuellement l'objet de recherches⁸⁵. A Baouît, seule une série de peintures est précisément datable. Il s'agit de la composition de la niche de la paroi ouest de la chapelle XVII. Trois inscriptions funéraires mentionnent la date exacte du décès de trois des personnages représentés (735, 737 et 739). Les peintures ont donc sans doute été réalisées un peu avant ou un peu après ces dates. Les peintures de Saqqarah sont généralement datées des VI^e-VII^e siècles⁸⁶. Dans la niche de la cellule F, un graffiti grec, daté du VIII^e siècle par B.P. Grenfell, était peint sur un personnage⁸⁷. La décoration picturale de l'église rupestre de Ouadi Sarga date des VI^e-VIII^e siècles⁸⁸.

Les comparaisons stylistiques suggèrent donc une date entre la fin du VI^e et le VIII^e siècle (ce qui correspond à la datation traditionnelle). À cette époque d'ailleurs, le culte de Côme et Damien, attesté déjà au V^e siècle, fleurit en Égypte et le culte de saint Jean Baptiste était populaire également.

5. 3. Les influences

La présence assez étonnante de saint Domèce semble suggérer une influence syrienne, sans doute à mettre en rapport avec le caractère international de la laure de Deir Abou Hennis⁸⁹ et l'inscription syriaque de l'église (voir plus haut). Bien que les saints Côme et Damien étaient également d'origine syrienne, leur culte était si populaire et répandu en Orient et à Rome qu'il n'y a pas lieu de voir une influence syrienne particulière pour expliquer leur présence.

Les personnages représentés indiquent aussi une influence du centre monastique de Scété (Macaire et peut-être Arsène). Les environs ont d'ailleurs des liens avec Scété: selon la tradition copte, Apa Jean le Petit s'est enfui de Scété (vers 407) et a fondé un monastère près d'Antinoé/Ansina; l'église du village d'Abou Hennis lui est consacrée⁹⁰. Apa Psoi/Anba Bishoi s'est aussi enfui de Scété vers 407 et a vécu dans le «Gebel» de Ansina; il est le saint titulaire de l'église de Deir el-Barshah (à quelques kilomètres d'Abou Hennis)⁹¹.

5.4. Conclusion

Les cortèges de saints semblent être un élément commun de la décoration picturale des bâtiments

monastiques et des églises dans l'Égypte du haut Moyen Âge. Malheureusement, ces ensembles sont souvent insuffisamment documentés. Dans l'état actuel des recherches, les saints du narthex de l'église rupestre de Abou Hennis forment une composition originale, influencée par la Syrie et Scété. Saint Jean Baptiste, le précurseur biblique des moines, est au milieu du tableau central, entouré par six moines, dont certains sont rarement représentés dans la peinture copte ancienne (Macaire, Arsène). Il faut enfin noter l'accent mis sur les saints médecins: Côme, Damien et Domèce (qui n'était pas encore attesté en Égypte), auquel on peut ajouter Saint Collouthos, peint sur le mur est de l'église.

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⁸⁵ Jusqu'à présent, seule une stratigraphie des couches a été publiée (voir note 48).

⁸⁶ Wietheger 1992, 74.

⁸⁷ Quibell 1907, 67.

⁸⁸ Selon Doresse, la date du décor de l'église «ne pourrait être postérieure au VI^e siècle». Selon Crum et Bell cependant, le fondateur du monastère, Apa Thomas, aurait vécu à la fin du VI^e siècle et le monastère aurait encore été occupé au VIII^e siècle (Doresse 2000, 2ⁱ, 405; Crum/Bell 1922, 9).

⁸⁹ Martin 1971, 69.

⁹⁰ Timm 1985, 577; Regnault/Van Esbroeck 1991.

⁹¹ Au IX^e siècle, les reliques de Anba Bishoi et son ami saint Paul de Tammah furent transférées au Ouadi Natroun (Timm 1985, 692-696; Coquin 1991b). Cependant ces deux saints ne sont pas représentés dans le narthex, ou en tout cas ils ne peuvent être identifiés.

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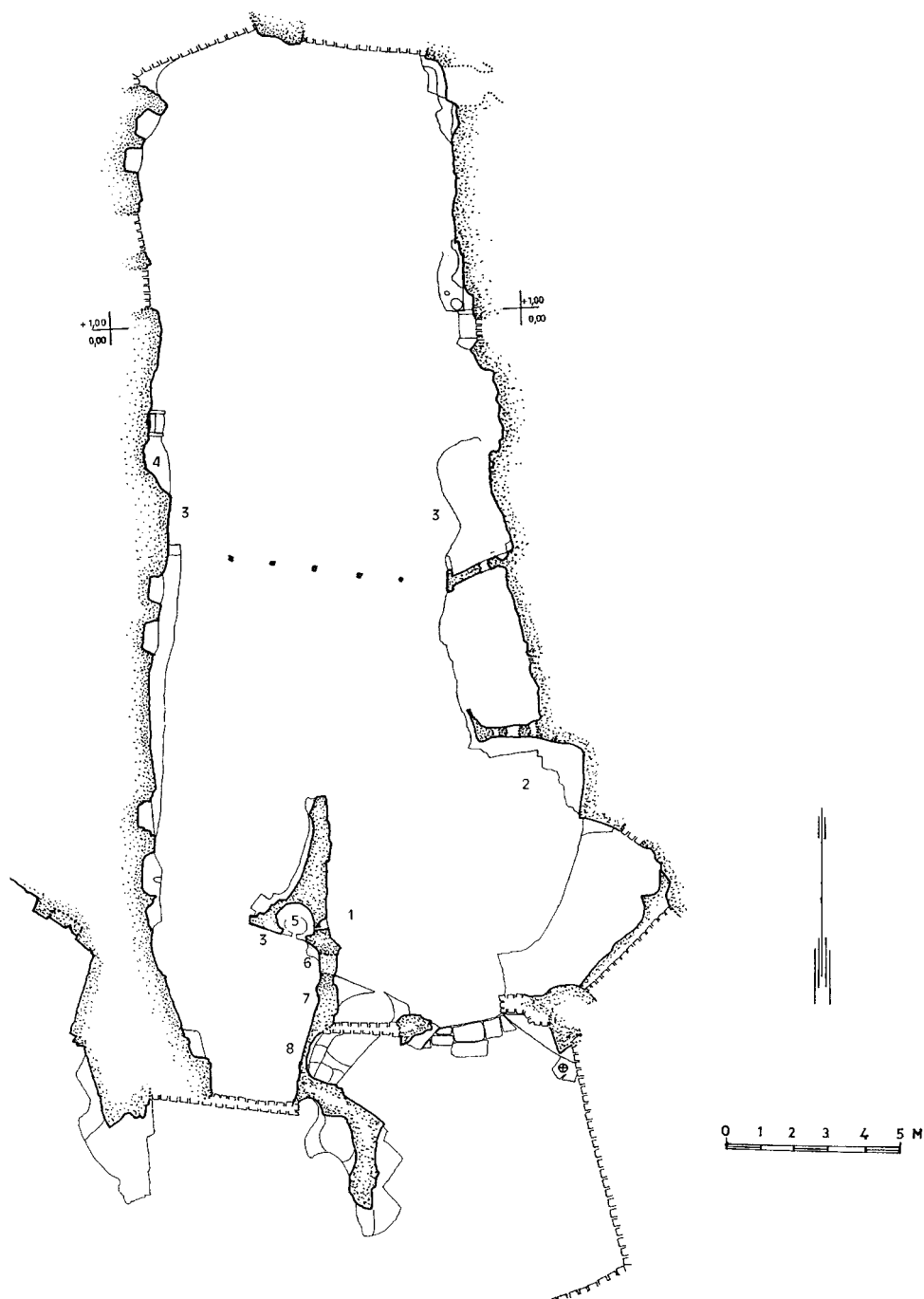


Fig. 1. Plan de l'église rupestre par S. Darmark, 1978 (© Société d'Égyptologie finlandaise)

1. Une série de saints en pied.
2. Le cycle de l'enfance du Christ.
3. Médaillon avec un saint en buste (mur est: saint Collouthos).
4. Le Christ accompagné par saint Jean Baptiste et son père Zacharie.
5. Les Noces de Cana.
6. La Résurrection de Lazare.
7. Le cycle de l'enfance de saint Jean Baptiste.
8. L'Annonciation à Marie.



Fig. 2. Narthex, paroi ouest: La frise des saints, tableau central. Photographie par Arthur Kingsley Porter († 1933). Courtesy of Historic Photographs, Fine Arts Library, Harvard College Library



Fig. 3. Narthex, paroi ouest: La frise des saints, la partie sud du tableau central. Photographie par Arthur Kingsley Porter († 1933). Courtesy of Historic Photographs, Fine Arts Library, Harvard College Library



Fig. 4. Narthex, paroi ouest, vue générale (photo: G.J.M. van Loon, 2004)

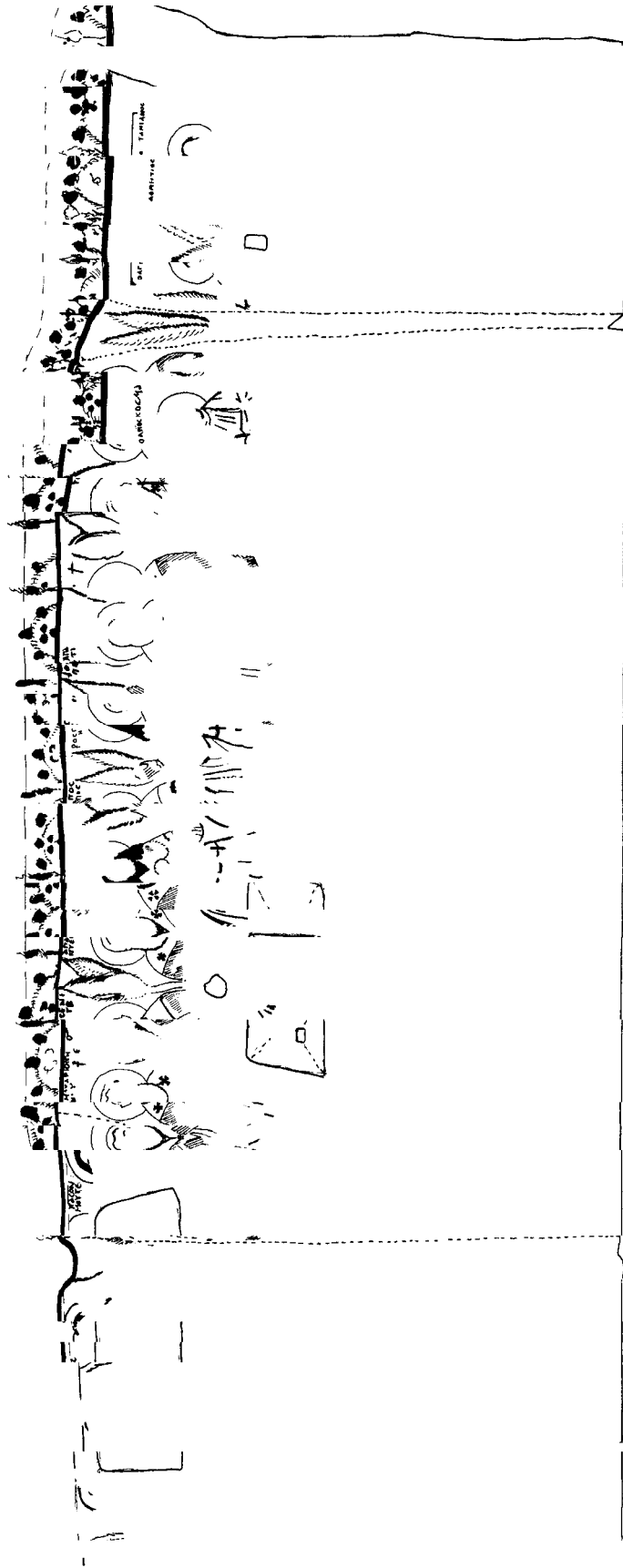


Fig. 5. Dessin de la paroi ouest, d'après un dessin de Holthoer (1978)

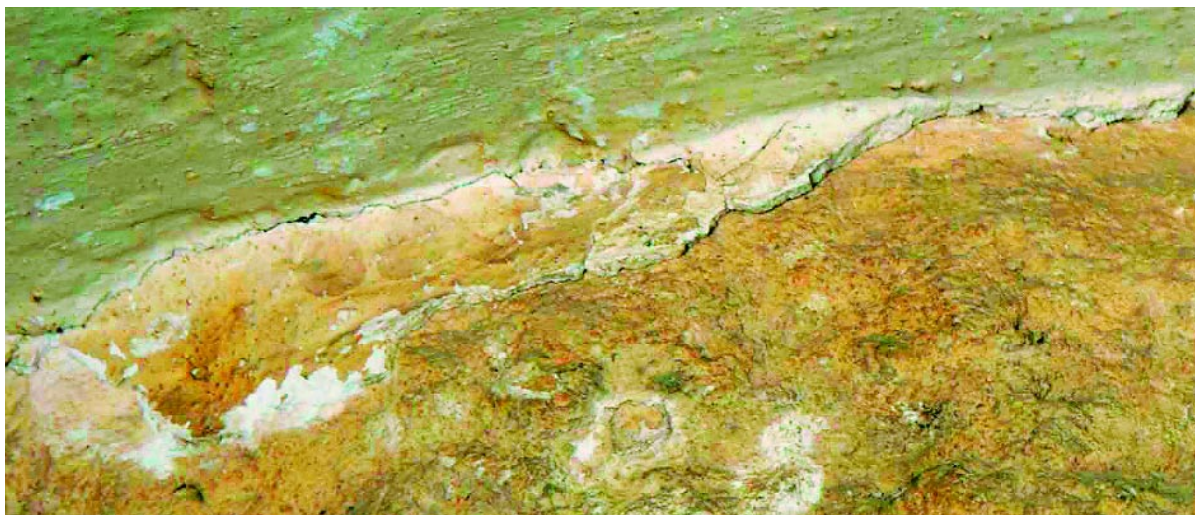


Fig. 6. Inscription du saint non identifié (3) (photo: G.J.M. van Loon, 2004)



Fig. 7. Frère Patermoute. (photo: G.J.M. van Loon, 2004)



*Fig. 8. Saint Arsène et saint Macaire le Grand
(© Société d'Égyptologie finlandaise)*



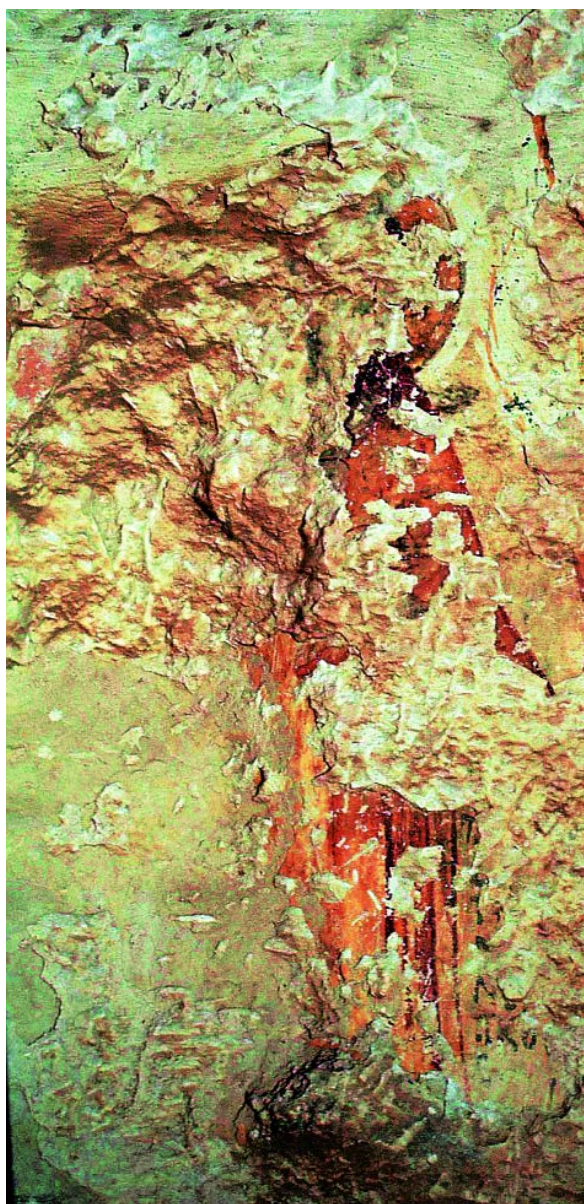
Fig. 9. Saint anonyme et le saint orant (© Société d'Égyptologie finlandaise)



Fig. 10. Trois saints anonymes à droite du saint orant (© Société d'Égyptologie finlandaise)



Fig. 11. Les saints Côme et Damien, saint Domèce (© Société d'Égyptologie finlandaise)



*Fig. 12. Saint Jean Baptiste du mur ouest de l'église
(photo: G.J.M. van Loon, 2004)*



*Fig. 13. Ouadi Natroun, Deir Abou Macaire,
haykal de Benjamin: Saint Jean Baptiste
(d'après Zibawi 2003, fig. 190)*



Fig. 14. Ouadi Sarga, les saints Côme et Damien et leurs frères (© Copyright The Trustees of The British Museum)



Fig. 15. Ouadi Natroun, monastère des Syriens, église de la Vierge, khurus, mur sud: les saints Côme et Damien (après restauration; photo: M. Immerzeel)

The Thirteenth-Century Flabellum from Deir al-Surian in the Musée Royal de Mariemont (Morlanwelz, Belgium)

Bas SNELDERS and Mat IMMERZEEL¹

With an Appendix on the Syriac inscriptions by Lucas Van Rompay

The collection in the Musée Royal de Mariemont contains a bronze flabellum which is of great significance to the study of Christian art in the Middle East dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Pls 1, 3; Fig. 1)². It was bought for the museum in Egypt in 1914 by Raoul Warocqué and initially classified as a Coptic work until it was discovered that its inscription is written in Syriac, and not in Coptic. In 1974/75 Jules Leroy published a short paper on the object at the request of the museum, but since then the flabellum has largely been ignored. Thilo Ulbert refers to the piece in his monograph on the so-called Resafa treasure, which comprises some other liturgical vessels with Syriac inscriptions, but although he includes a very good photograph, the flabellum is hardly discussed in the text³. The purpose of the present article is not only to draw attention to this little-studied object, but also to shed some light on its function, iconography, style, inscriptions and provenance in relation to its historical context.

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the relationship between Christian and Islamic art and architecture in the Middle East⁴. A group of eighteen objects commonly referred to as *Ayyubid metalwork with Christian images* are particularly suitable for a study on this subject⁵. They are generally assigned to Syria and North Mesopotamia and date from around the mid-thirteenth century. These various different bronze (or brass) vessels, inlaid with silver, are decorated with Christian and Islamic themes side by side. The bronzes depict Gospel scenes, images of the Virgin and Child, and friezes of saints and clerics alongside traditional Islamic scenes such as the standard cycle of royal pastimes. The patrons or buyers of these pieces are mostly unknown, with two exceptions: a tray in the Louvre (ca 1239-1249) and the so-called d'Arenberg basin (ca 1247-1249) in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Both were made for the same sultan, al-Malik al-Salih Najm

al-Din (d. 1249) of the Ayyubid dynasty. The fact that the only known buyer or patron was a Muslim has led scholars to believe that these kinds of objects were not produced for a Christian clientele, but only for Muslims. They concluded that for Muslims who owned these objects, the Christian scenes depicted on them were a reminder of their authority over the Christians⁶. In a recent publication it is straightforwardly assumed that the local Christians had no role in the creation of these works⁷. In short, present scholarly opinion is that these objects, decorated with Christian religious themes, were

¹ The authors would like to express their gratitude to Madame Marie-Cécile Bruwier, curator of the Musée Royal de Mariemont, and other staff members of the museum for their invaluable assistance, to Jan van Ginkel, Robert Hillenbrand and Dirk Kruisheer for their highly appreciated advices, to Demet Varli for photographing the flabellum, and to Maria Sherwood-Smith for her help in correcting the English in the article.

² Inv. No. IIIG 76B 2.

³ Ulbert 1990, 33, Taf. 55b. During excavations in 1982 in the Church of the Holy Cross at Resafa (Sergiupolis), approximately 160 kilometres southeast of Aleppo, a silver chalice and paten dating from around 1200 were discovered, both bearing dedicatory inscriptions written in Syriac. They had probably been buried, together with other liturgical vessels, in order to save them from the Mongols, who sacked the desert city in 1259/60.

⁴ Lucy-Anne Hunt has been a major contributor to this: Hunt 1998 and 2000a. See also: Cruikshank Dodd 2001, 117-123. At present Snelders, for his doctoral dissertation, is carrying out research on the relationship between Christian and Islamic art and architecture in Syria and Iraq in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The emphasis is on the direct contact between Syrian Christians and Muslims. His research therefore focuses on the production of art with Christian as well as Islamic features in a group of inlaid bronzes, a number of medieval churches decorated with stone carving in the area of Mosul, and some glass vessels.

⁵ Baer 1989.

⁶ Baer 1989, 48. Katzenstein/Lowry (1983, 65) have taken them to be an acknowledgement of Christianity's peaceful role within Muslim society.

⁷ Evans/Wixom 1997, 424-425.

produced by Muslim craftsmen for Muslim consumption. However, if one includes the bronze flabellum in the discussion a very different picture emerges.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The flabellum consists of a circular disk attached to a conical holder which has a large spherical knob towards the end. It was designed to be mounted on a wooden staff. The total weight of the object is 1.95 kg and the disk has a diameter of 46.7 cm. While the reverse of the disk was left unadorned, the obverse has been provided with an engraved decoration. It is divided into three concentric registers around a central medallion, which is 12.9 cm in diameter (Pls 1, 3; Fig. 1). The outer register, from which two large parts have broken off, is 2.2-2.6 cm in width and has a row of tiny holes, the function of which will be discussed later. The second register is 2.5-2.7 cm wide and has been embellished with a Syriac inscription stating that it was made in 1202/03 (A.G. 1514) for '*the Monastery of the House of the Mother of God, Mart(y) Maryam, in the desert of Scetis*' (see Appendix). Although the inscription does not explicitly mention it as a donation, this does seem probable; the fact alone that this elaborate text was applied, including the name of the monastery for which it was made and the date, suggests that the flabellum was more than just a liturgical object. However, the notion that the monastery itself, or one of its richer inhabitants, ordered and paid for the flabellum cannot completely be discarded. Additional research on the nature of inscriptions on other metalwork from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries may shed some light on this matter. The precise dedication on the flabellum clearly refers to Deir al-Surian in the Wadi al-Natrun (the ancient Scetis) in Egypt; the monastery and its main church were both dedicated to the Holy Virgin, al-ʿAdra. The third register on the flabellum has been left plain, while the central medallion depicts the Virgin and Child. This scene will now be described in greater detail. Its iconography and style will be examined subsequently.

Mary is portrayed sitting on a high-backed, cushioned throne, her feet resting on an arc. She looks straight at the beholder, supporting the Christ-child with her left hand, which is barely visible, and gesturing towards him with her right. Christ is sitting sideways (although he seems to be

standing) facing the viewer and raising his right hand. Contrary to common practice, this hand does not make the usual gesture signifying blessing, nor does the Child hold a scroll in his left hand. Two flying angels with outstretched arms hover above the throne, on either side of the head of the Virgin. Their right hands slightly overlap the edge of the Virgin's halo, suggesting they may be holding it. The throne has a rectangular backrest, the left-hand side of which has a looped, upward protrusion, while the right-hand side is decorated with a triangular form projecting outwards. The upper side of the backrest has a horizontal frieze, decorated with a simple zigzag pattern. The throne rests on two legs which taper before the foot. The engraver was not expert in his representation of the throne, which has various elements that do not correspond with each other. For example, the frieze with the decorative zigzag pattern is level with the Virgin's left shoulder, while the other side is much lower. The same is true of the cushion; to the right it is much lower than to the left. It looks as though the artist tried to correct his fault by placing the triangle on the right at the correct height. He then compensated for the resulting empty space by filling it with a decorative background, which gives the onlooker the impression of looking through the back of the throne. Equally strange is the wing of the angel on the right-hand-side, which merges with the Virgin's halo.

Similar shortcomings and incongruities can also be found in the treatment of the clothing of both Mother and Child. The Virgin seems to have a sort of crown, represented by a headband with three points. She is wearing a long tunic and cloak, part of which falls over her right shoulder. This is probably meant to be a *maphorion*. The child is dressed in a simple tunic which reaches to his bare feet. It is not always immediately clear, particularly in the case of the folds in the centre of the picture, which is the Virgin's clothing and which is that of Christ. There is a similar problem with the representation of the small carpet spread over the cushion on which Mary is sitting. To the right of the Virgin, the carpet is clearly shown by two vertical lines which fall from the cushion, and it appears to be decorated with a fringe represented by three small rectangles. However, this detail is completely absent on the other side and, even more surprisingly, the line indicating the outer edge of the carpet merges with the Virgin's clothing, while



*Pl. 1. Flabellum. Musée Royal de Mariemont, Morlanwelz, IIIIG 76B 2
(Photo: Courtesy of the Musée Royal de Mariemont, Morlanwelz)*

it is clear that the vertical line running upwards from Mary's right foot should represent the border of her tunic. All of these incongruities show that the engraver did not fully understand his model. Whatever the reason, this clearly points towards the work being the creation of a mediocre craftsman. The whole scene is set against a background of scrolling stems with hooked leaves, a common feature of thirteenth-century Syrian and North Mesopotamian metalwork. The same regularly winding spirals are used for the register with the dedicatory inscription. A second Syriac inscription placed on either side of the throne in the central medallion, reads as follows: '*Mother of God, Help me in my prayer*' (see Appendix; Pls 6-7).

THE OBJECT AND ITS FUNCTION

The object under discussion is a fan, which is part of the standard group of liturgical objects, like the chalice, paten and incense burner. In Greek it is called a *rhypidion*, in Latin *flabellum*. In Syriac it is designated *marwḥā* or *marwaḥtā*⁸. There is early documentation referring to the liturgical use of the fan in the East. The earliest existing reference to the fans, which were always used in pairs, can be found in the *Apostolic constitutions* (VIII. 12.3-4), a work dating from the end of the fourth century, recording the Clementine rite. It contains the following text: "*Let two of the deacons, on each side of the altar, hold a fan, made up of thin membranes, or of feathers of the peacock, or fine cloth, and let them silently drive away the small animals that fly about, that they may not come near the cups.*" According to this source, these fans originally had a practical function: they were used to keep the insects away from the Eucharist and out of the communion chalice. Initially they were made of relatively inexpensive materials such as peacock feathers, parchment or cloth. As the liturgy became more ritualised, their role changed and became mainly ceremonial. This

not only affected the materials used for these kinds of fans, now usually silver, but also the decoration, which became more symbolic. The deacons holding the fans were thought to represent the cherubim and seraphim whose wings invisibly covered the altar during the Divine service. As early as ca 500, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in his *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchica* mentions the fan-bearing deacons standing next to the altar as a symbol of the six-winged seraphim⁹.

In keeping with this symbolism, the fans were usually decorated with images of these angelic beings. The earliest extant examples are the pair of silver-gilt fans stamped with the year 577, from the Kaper Koraon treasure, found in Syria¹⁰. The decoration of the piece at the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul consists of a *hexapterygon* flanked by fiery wheels engraved on a plain central disk, which is surrounded by a scalloped border worked as sixteen peacock feathers. The *hexapterygon* is one of the seraphim singing the *Tersanctus* before the Throne of God in the Vision of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:3). The same overall design is duplicated on the related fan in the Dumbarton Oaks collection, although here the seraph has been replaced by the image of a cherub, a four-winged creature that guards the Throne of God in the Vision of Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:5ff and 10).

Apart from these two examples only a few other liturgical fans from the early period have survived; they are all embellished with similar decoration. At the Brooklyn Museum in New York there is a pair of silver flabella, possibly of Coptic origin, decorated with a variation of the iconography described above¹¹. They consist of circular disks attached to cylindrical staffs. Each disk is worked in repoussé depicting the symbols of two evangelists enclosed in six wings covered with eyes. They are framed by a Greek inscription from the Liturgy of St Mark. The dating of these pieces is still uncertain. Bréhier dated them to the eighth or ninth century, but more recently, Volbach assigned them to the eleventh or twelfth century¹². The Georgian Museum of Fine Art in Tbilisi has an example of a fan (tenth/eleventh century) in the form of a tetrafoil, a type that seems to be particular to Georgia and Armenia. It is made of two separate pieces riveted together, both with repoussé decoration. On the obverse, ten angel deacons are depicted holding chalices and fans, while the reverse shows an image of the tetramorph.

⁸ For an introduction to the liturgical fan, see: *DACL*, vol. 5.2, 1610-1626; Braun 1973, 642-647; Mundell Mango 1986, 151-154; *RByzK*, vol. 2, 550-555.

⁹ Braun 1973, 645.

¹⁰ Mundell Mango 1986, no. 31-32.

¹¹ Essen 1963, no. 165.

¹² Bréhier 1945, 96ff; Essen 1963, 269.



Pl. 2. Deir al-Surian, wall painting of the Dormition (Photo: Courtesy of M. Immerzeel, Paul van Moorsel Centre)

Although relatively few actual fans have survived, depictions of them are often to be found in paintings and mosaics, especially in iconographic motifs with liturgical connotations such as the Communion of the Apostles, or the motif showing the officiating prelates holding scrolls and walking eastwards. Both scenes are frequently depicted in church apses. A good example of the former motif can be found in a thirteenth-century Syriac lectionary, written by Dioscoros Theodorus (ca 1210-1282), now in the Library of the Church of the Forty Martyrs near the Monastery of Mar Hanania (Deir al-Zaʿfaran) near Mardin¹³. Behind the altar are a pair of angels holding golden flabella, symbolising the deacons who assist the priest during the liturgy. The fans are decorated with the image of six-winged seraphim, and are bejewelled with red and white stones. The thirteenth-century apse painting of the Bezirana Kilisesi at Belisirma in Cappadocia shows the motif of the officiating prelates¹⁴. Behind the altar two angel deacons stand waving a flabellum decorated with a seraph. Illustrations of liturgical fans are not confined to these two themes; they also include, for example,

Dormition scenes such as the one in the northern half-dome of the *khurus* in the Church of al-ʿAdra in Deir al-Surian, probably dating from the first half of the thirteenth century (Pl. 2)¹⁵. In this painting, Mary is depicted lying down on a bier flanked by the apostles. Christ holds her soul, represented as a swaddled infant, while two angels in medallions wave golden fans in sign of reverence. The fans are not adorned with an image of angelic beings, but are bejewelled with green and red stones.

There are also documentary references to liturgical fans in, church and monastery inventories. An example of this can be found in the *Synodicon*, a Syriac manuscript (1204) which incorporates

¹³ Leroy 1964, 374-375, Pl. 131,1.

¹⁴ Jolivet-Lévy 1991, 316, Pl. 173.

¹⁵ Leroy 1982, 72-74, Pl. 136; Hunt 1998, 245-248, Fig. 4. A short list of other artworks illustrating liturgical fans can be found in: *RByzK*, vol. 2, 553-554. They are also depicted on some inlaid bronze vessels with Christian subject-matter, such as on the tray at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg showing a deacon holding a censer as well as an undecorated fan (Baer 1989, Pl. 28).

legislative sources, in a passage describing the churches and monasteries built or repaired by Mar Yuhannan, bishop of Mardin (1125-1165): “*He expressed great care, diligence and pains for churches, (their) properties and substantial legacies which are useful for the churches and monasteries, as (cultic) bowls, cups, censers, crosses, fans (made) of gold or silver. He bequeathed them to the churches together with chairs, chests, curtains, anaphoras, etc.*”¹⁶ In his *Chronography*, Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286) mentions the heritage of Patriarch Ignatius II David (1222-1252), most of which was donated to the Monastery of Mar Barsaumo, the seat of the Syrian Orthodox patriarch in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The remaining objects, including a golden cross and a pair of silver flabella, were given to the Armenian Catholicos¹⁷.

Other surviving examples of liturgical fans are of a considerably later date. In general they depict the same scenes of six-winged seraphim, although the decoration is enriched by the addition of other motifs, such as the figures of Christ, the Virgin, and other saints and clerics. Only a few pieces will be mentioned here. The Megaspoleon Monastery in Greece has a rhipidion portraying the Virgin and Child, encircled by eight medallions with images of seraphim and symbols of the four evangelists¹⁸. Two enamelled fans in the Metropole of Sèvres (fourteenth/fifteenth century) are decorated on both sides with images of seraphim and half-length angels, each holding two fans. They encircle central medallions with an enthroned Christ on the front and the Emmanuel on the back¹⁹. The Christ Emmanuel is also portrayed on a Slavic-Greek rhipidion in Karlowitz (1497), although this fan is more interesting for the tiny pendent bells, called *tintinnabula*, attached to it. They represent the sound of the angels’ wings as they fly around the Throne of God. Fans with bells were in use as early as the twelfth century²⁰. This could offer an explanation for the little holes in the outer register on

the flabellum of Deir al-Surian. It is very probable that they were designed to hold the same kind of bells. Another possibility, according to Leroy, is that these perforations were meant for either feathers, pieces of ribbon or another kind of cloth, thus increasing the efficiency of the fan²¹. However, no evidence remains to show which of these materials was used.

The Putna Monastery in Hungary has a pair of identical silver flabella (1497) worked in repoussé, each consisting of five medallions with seraphim²². A pair of Greek rhipidia at the Benaki Museum in Athens (1690), both silver gilt and worked in repoussé, are decorated with an archangel in the central medallion surrounded by four smaller medallions with images of the six-winged creatures²³. These examples show that the iconographic programme for liturgical fans, which was developed in the Early Christian period, lasted for centuries. This is not surprising given that the seraphim and cherubim are two of the nine orders of angels guarding the Throne of God: as such they are particularly appropriate as a decoration for an object used to protect the Eucharist during the Divine Liturgy. The flabellum from Deir al-Surian seems unusual in that it does not depict six-winged seraphim. However, the central medallion with the Virgin and Child enthroned is very appropriate for an object that was to be used in a church dedicated to the Holy Virgin.

Now let us return to the function of these objects. Initially the fans were used only during the central part of the celebration of the Eucharist, but as their function became more symbolic than practical, they were put to wider use. To emphasize the importance of the liturgical actions, the fans were used, for example, during the reading of the Gospel, at the offertory and before the communion. Furthermore, they were carried in processions such as the one held during the preparation and consecration of the chrism. In his commentary on the West Syrian liturgy, George, Bishop of the Arab Tribes (687-724), gives a detailed description of such a procession: “*The bishop takes that oil which he wishes to consecrate, placed in a vessel of gold or of silver or of glass, and goes forth from the diaconicum with a procession, twelve deacons carrying twelve fans and covering the oil and the bishop at once. And censers and lights go before him, and the whole brotherhood of the people singing hymns. And thus he brings it in and sets it on the holy altar. And he consecrates*

¹⁶ Vööbus 1976, 220.

¹⁷ Abbeloos/Lamy 1872, II, col. 694.

¹⁸ Braun 1973, 647.

¹⁹ Braun 1973, 647, Taf. 144, no. 558; Bréhier 1930, 93-94, Pl. LXXII.

²⁰ Braun 1973, 647, Taf. 144, no. 559.

²¹ Leroy 1974-1975, 33.

²² Volbach/Lafontaine-Dosogne 1968, no. 275.

²³ Chatzidakis 1975, 11, Pl. 31.

*it with the prayers appointed for it. But it is not covered by a veil, but by the fans only ... That the bishop sets it upon the altar covered by the wings of the fans, shews that all the works of the Church, and all her rites, she performs with meekness and modesty and in secret, and not with vain glory and ostentation. ... But the twelve wings of the fans signify the wings of the seraphim, who stand by the appointed place of Jesus. The altar also depicts Jesus to us ...*²⁴. According to this text, as many as twelve fans could be used during the liturgy.

Apart from the foregoing liturgical uses, fans were used also during the consecration of bishops and the ordination of deacons, both of which are illustrated in a Syrian manuscript (Paris Bibl. Nat. Syr. 112), dating from 1238-1239, which describes ordination services²⁵. When not in use, they were probably exhibited in the sanctuary by the altar, together with other liturgical vessels. In his eleventh-century commentary on the liturgy, Yahya ibn Jaris mentions flabella that were placed to the right and left of the altar. He compares them with the two thieves on the crosses flanking Christ and the two cherubim that guarded the Temple sanctuary²⁶. Such a display is depicted in the thirteenth-century apse painting at the cathedral in Kobayr (Armenia), which shows two flabella placed next to the altar²⁷. A miniature representing the consecration of the altar in a Syriac manuscript from around 1220 illustrates a similar presentation of the liturgical vessels²⁸.

ICONOGRAPHY

The Virgin holding the Christ-child in her left arm and gesturing towards him with her right hand, as in the central medallion of the flabellum, is commonly referred to as the *Hodegetria*, meaning 'she who points the way' (Pl. 3; Fig. 1)²⁹. The name of this iconographic type does not originate from the gesture of the Virgin, but rather from the famous icon that was held at the Constantinopolitan monastery of the Hodegon, which took its name from the monks who led blind people to a miraculous spring that was able to restore sight³⁰. According to popular tradition, recorded from the end of the twelfth century, the icon was painted by St Luke. In the fifth century it was sent by Athenais-Eudokia from Jerusalem to her sister in law, the Empress Pulcheria in Constantinople. The icon of the Virgin Hodegetria served as the

palladium of Constantinople and as such was taken to the walls to protect the city during sieges. On special occasions it was carried in procession through the streets³¹. The Hodegetria was one of the most popular and common iconographic types of the Virgin in Byzantine art, and it was more widespread than any other icon.

Originally the Hodegetria icons represented standing images of the Virgin in full, but this composition was gradually superseded by a version depicting Mary in torso³². A third variant is the enthroned Hodegetria, in which the Virgin is again depicted in full figure. This particular type most probably originated from Early Christian examples representing the Adoration of the Magi. In some versions of this historical scene, the Christ-child is depicted sitting on the Virgin's left knee, while she supports him with her left arm, a pose which is more or less identical to that of the enthroned Hodegetria. According to Victor Lazarev it was in the East – probably in Egypt or Syria – that the image was removed from its historical composition, thus transforming it into an independent type³³. To judge from the existing evidence it appears that this iconic type was then adopted in Armenia and Georgia, where the Syrian influence was strong³⁴.

²⁴ Connolly/Codrington 1913, 21-23.

²⁵ Leroy 1964, 333, Pl. 111,2 (ordination of a deacon), Pl. 112,2 (consecration of bishop).

²⁶ McVey 1983, 104.

²⁷ Thierry 1980/81, 106.

²⁸ Leroy 1964, 303, Pl. 74,1.

²⁹ For an introduction to the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria, see: Hadermann-Misguich 1975, 62-67; Lazarev 1995, 226-248.

³⁰ ODB, vol. 2, 939.

³¹ ODB, vol. 3, 2172.

³² Lazarev 1995, 226.

³³ The independent type of the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria can already be found on the following monuments and objects: relief, western portal of the East Church at Zebed, fifth century (Butler 1929, 245, Ill. 248); silk textile, Victoria and Albert Museum, sixth century (Lazarev 1995, Fig. 25); ivory panel, Etchmiadzin, sixth century (Der Nersessian 1977a, Fig. 50); St Andoche ivory, Saulieu, sixth century (Dinkler 1970, Abb. 321); fresco from Bawit, room 6, now in the Coptic Museum, Cairo, sixth century (Bolman 2002, Fig. 6.4).

³⁴ In Armenia and Georgia the enthroned Hodegetria appears on the following monuments and objects: relief, Basilica in Odzun, sixth century (Der Nersessian 1977a, Fig. 31); capital, Dvin, sixth century (Der Nersessian 1977a, Fig. 33); stele, Thalin, sixth/seventh century (Lazarev 1995, Fig. 34); stele, Kharabavank', seventh century (Lazarev 1995, Fig. 32).



Pl. 3. Medallion on the flabellum (Photo: Courtesy of D. Varli)

In contrast to the standing and torso Hodegetria, the enthroned Hodegetria was never generally accepted in the Byzantine tradition, but it did become widespread in the countries to the east of the Byzantine Empire.

In Byzantine monumental art there are only two examples of the enthroned Hodegetria, both are wall paintings in church apses: one at the Church of St George in Kurbinovo (Macedonia), and

another at the Church of the Saints Anargyres in Castoria (North Greece)³⁵. These paintings date from the end of the twelfth century and were most probably painted by the same workshop. In both instances the Virgin is sitting on a backless throne, holding the Child in her left arm and, contrary to the usual position, touching his feet with her right. Christ is sitting sideways, raising his right hand in blessing and holding a scroll in his left. They are flanked by the archangels Michael and Gabriel. Another indication of the relative lack of popularity of this particular version of the Hodegetria can

³⁵ Hadermann-Misguich 1975, Figs 9, 11.



Fig. 1. Medallion on the flabellum

be found in the corpus of Byzantine ivory panels, in which examples of all three types of Hodegetria are represented. The enthroned version occurs only twice: on a panel formerly in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin (eleventh century), and on another panel in the Cathedral of Chambéry (twelfth century)³⁶. This last piece represents the enthroned Hodegetria between St Peter and St Paul, while two attending angels with outstretched arms hover above the throne. An almost exact mirror image of this can be found in the Berlin carving, which lacks only the two saints flanking the throne. Moreover, the Christ-child is shown seated on the Virgin's right arm, while she gestures toward him with her left. This is a variation on the Virgin Hodegetria, commonly referred to as *Dexiokratousa*. Thus, strictly speaking, the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria is depicted only once in ivory carving, whereas Adolph Goldschmidt and Kurt Weitzmann have listed thirteen examples of the standing Hodegetria³⁷. Most popular of all, however, is the half-length image of the Hodegetria, of which there

are no less than twenty-five examples³⁸. This leads one to conclude that the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria was not common in the Byzantine tradition.

However, despite its relative rarity in Byzantine art, the enthroned Hodegetria remained very popular in Armenia and Georgia until the late Middle Ages³⁹. In addition, there are several thirteenth-century examples to be found in Egypt and Greater

³⁶ Berlin: Goldschmidt/Weitzmann 1979, no. 29, Pl. IX; Lazarev 1995, 238, Fig. 42. Chambéry: Goldschmidt/Weitzmann 1979, no. 222, Pl. LXXII; Lazarev 1995, 238, Fig. 43.

³⁷ Goldschmidt/Weitzmann 1979, nos 46-49, 51, 73, 78, 86, 116, 142-145.

³⁸ Cutler 1994, 175. For the short list of other Byzantine examples of the enthroned Hodegetria, see: Hadermann-Misguich 1975, 65-67; Lazarev 1995, 238-241.

³⁹ Relief south façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght'amar, 915-921 (Der Nersessian 1965, Fig. 21); chalice from Bedia, ca 999 (Evans/Wixom 1997, no. 231); silver icon from Zageri, ca 1000 (Volbach/Lafontaine-Dosogne 1968,

Syria⁴⁰, which will be addressed separately. Finally, there are some wall paintings of the enthroned Hodegetria in Cappadocia⁴¹. On the basis of this inventory, one may conclude that the enthroned Hodegetria was far more popular in the Christian East than in the art of Byzantium, though the few examples that can be found there show that the theme was not unknown in Byzantine iconography, and was even depicted in the capital.

THE ENTHRONED VIRGIN HODEGETRIA IN EGYPT AND GREATER SYRIA

Since the inscription on the flabellum explicitly mentions Deir al-Surian as the place for which it was made, it is in Egypt that we first should look for iconographic parallels. Although the images of the Virgin and Child occur widely in Coptic art, the Virgin Hodegetria is not of prime importance in the iconography of Christian Egypt⁴². A motif that does seem to have enjoyed a particular popularity in the Coptic tradition is the so-called Virgin *Galactotrophousa*, in which Mary nurses the Child⁴³. In the illuminated Coptic or Copto-Arabic manuscripts, for instance, there is only one example of a standing Hodegetria⁴⁴, while all other representations of Mary are of the *Galactotrophousa* type⁴⁵. Although strictly speaking the enthroned Hodegetria is not represented, MS Copte 13 (Bibl. Nat. Paris; late twelfth century) does contain a miniature of the Adoration of the Magi in which the Virgin is seated, holding the Child with her left hand and gesturing towards him with her right, while he extends his right arm in the direction of the approaching Magi⁴⁶. According to Lazarev, this scene echoes the Early Christian composition from which the enthroned Hodegetria later crystallized⁴⁷. In monumental art, the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria appears in the twelfth-century apse painting in the church of Deir al-Shuhada (Monastery of the Martyrs) in Esna, and in the eastern apse of the Church of St Anthony (1232/1233) in Deir Anba Antonius near the Red Sea⁴⁸. In both instances the painting is divided into two registers. The upper register shows Christ in Majesty surrounded by symbols of the four evangelists. The lower register represents the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria flanked by the archangels Michael and Gabriel. The Virgin is depicted frontally, holding the Child with her left hand and pointing to him with her right. Christ sits sideways, looking up at his mother and raising his right hand in blessing. In his left hand he holds a scroll. The archangels are standing frontally and each holds a large disc in his left hand. In the painting at the Monastery of St Anthony, Mary rests her feet on a rectangular footstool, which is not present in the portrait in Esna. The two-zoned composition of the Christ in Majesty above the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria most probably reflects an Early Christian composition, perhaps along the lines of the painting

no. 359); dedication miniature, the Gospels of Adrianople, 1007 (Evans/Wixom 1997, no. 239); apse painting, Vardzia, 1184-1186 (Alpago-Novello/Beridze/Lafontaine-Dosogne 1980, Fig. 122); apse painting, Timotesubani, ca 1220 (Alpago-Novello/Beridze/Lafontaine-Dosogne 1980, 97); apse painting, Church of the Virgin, Kintsvisi, end of thirteenth/beginning of fourteenth century (Velmans 1978, Fig. 2); relief tympanum, Aisasy, 1270 (Lazarev 1995, Fig. 30); relief tympanum, Zindjirli, 1301 (Der Nersessian 1977b, Fig. 9); relief tympanum, Amaghrou-Noravank, 1321 (Nersessian 1977b, Fig. 3); relief tympanum, Arp'a, 1321 (Der Nersessian 1977b, Fig. 5).

⁴⁰ By 'Greater Syria' we mean the region which in the period under discussion was the cultural area of Syria, i.e. modern Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, parts of Turkey, and Iraq.

⁴¹ Apse painting, Church of St Peter and St Paul, Meskendir, seventh/ninth century (Jolivet-Lévy 1991, Pl. 46,2); apse painting, Balli Kilise, Belisirma, tenth century (Jolivet-Lévy 1991, Pl. 172,2); Church of the Mother of God, Selime, tenth century (Jolivet-Lévy 1991, Pl. 185); Eski Gümüş Monastery, painting east wall narthex, eleventh century (Rodley 1985, Pl. 111); apse painting, Church of St George, Ortaköy, thirteenth/fourteenth century (Jolivet-Lévy 1991, Pl. 141,1).

⁴² An introduction to the iconography of the Virgin in Coptic art can be found in: Leroy 1974b, 202-205; Leroy 1975, 52-54.

⁴³ For an introduction to the *Galactotrophousa*, see: Kühnel 1988, 23-26; Lazarev 1995, 197-216; Van Moorsel 2000.

⁴⁴ Vatican Library, MS Copto 1 (thirteenth/fourteenth century): Leroy 1974b, 109-110, 203, Pl. 98,1.

⁴⁵ In four manuscripts, all dating from the ninth/tenth century: Leroy 1974b, 203-204, Pls 29, 31, 34, 36; Depuydt 1995, no. 59, Pl. 11, no. 96, Pl. 12, no. 196, Pl. 13. The *Galactotrophousa* can also be found within the Syrian context: Cave Church of Saydet-Naia, Kfar Schleiman (Lebanon), thirteenth century (Hélou 1999, Pl. 26); Church of Mar Sarkis in Qara [standing?] (Westphalen 2000, 496, Abb. 26) and on a column in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (Kühnel 1988, 22-26, Pls 7, 8). This may point to oriental roots, although the rare occurrences of this image in earlier Byzantine and Western art cast some doubts on this theory (Lazarev 1995, 196-216).

⁴⁶ Leroy 1974b, Pl. 44,3.

⁴⁷ Lazarev 1995, 237.

⁴⁸ Leroy 1975, Pls 26, 27; Van Moorsel 1995/97, 45-48, Pls 19-20, Fig. 14; Bolman 2002, 65, 96-97, Fig. 4.28.

removed from room six at the Monastery of St Apollo in Bawit and now in the Coptic Museum, Cairo⁴⁹.

A silver casket containing the Gospels (1255) in the Coptic Museum in Cairo also features our subject matter⁵⁰. Each side is worked in repoussé and supplied with an inscription in Arabic, which states that it was donated to an unknown church dedicated to the 'revered angel'. The reverse of the casket is embellished with the image of an archangel, while the obverse shows the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria. The Virgin is depicted frontally, sitting on a throne with a rounded backrest. She supports the Child with her left hand and gestures toward him with her right. Christ is sitting sideways, looking towards the viewer. The infant's right hand is raised, but does not make the usual gesture signifying blessing. In his left hand he holds an orb instead of the usual scroll. The Virgin and Child each wear a crown with a cross on top of their haloes.

Apart from the more obvious resemblance between the Coptic examples of the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria and the version depicted on the central medallion of the flabellum from Deir al-Surian, which do, after all, represent the same theme, there are no specific iconographic or stylistic parallels between them. Yet we do come across such parallels within the Syrian region. Images of the Virgin and Child, dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, can be found widely in Greater Syria. They generally conform to Byzantine models. By far the most popular version is that of the Virgin enthroned with the Child sitting frontally on her lap, commonly referred to as the *Nikopoia*⁵¹. In other examples she is portrayed as the *Galactotrophousa*⁵², as Maria *Platitera*, holding a medallion with the bust of Christ inside it⁵³, or as the standing *Hodegetria*⁵⁴. There are also examples of the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria from this region: a wall painting, two manuscript illustrations and a piece of metalwork.

A fresco removed from the west wall of the 'Baptismal Chapel' outside the Hospitaller fortress of Krak des Chevaliers, of which only a few poorly preserved fragments survive, represents the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria (ca 1170)⁵⁵. Since very little of the original painting is visible today, only a few remarks can be made on the iconography. The Virgin is seated on a richly bejewelled throne, holding the Christ-child (whose halo is also bejewelled) in her left arm and gesturing towards

him with her right. Standing on either side of them, in the background, are two angels (only one of which has survived), each wearing a fillet. Immediately next to the throne is a standing figure of St Panteleon. Jaroslav Folda suggests that the painting was probably executed by a local Syrian Orthodox painter whose style and iconography were strongly influenced by Byzantine art⁵⁶.

A wall painting representing the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria on the south wall of the Church

⁴⁹ Bolman 2002, Fig. 6.4.

⁵⁰ Paris 2000, no. 46.

⁵¹ Wall paintings: Bkeftine, Chapel of Deir Saydet-Bkeftine, twelfth/thirteenth century (Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 303; Immerzeel 2000, no. 13); Kfar Qahil, Chapel of Deir Mar Elias an-Nahr (Immerzeel 2000, no. 14); Qusba, Church of Saydet, thirteenth century (Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 303, 394); Qusba/Hamatur, Chapel of Deir Saydet Hamatur, thirteenth century (Hélou 1999, 21-22, Pl. 21; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 304, 387-398; Immerzeel 2000, no. 12); Rashkida, Church of Mar Girgis, first half of the twelfth century (Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 300-301, 406-407); Eddé al-Batrun, Church of Mar Saba, late twelfth/thirteenth century (Hélou 1999, Pl. 12; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 302, 380-381); Ma'arat Saydnaya, Chapel of Mar Elias, Innemée/Immerzeel 2000, 76, Fig. 4, Fig. XII). The silver chalice with a Syrian inscription from the Resafa treasure, dating from around 1200, also depicts the *Nikopoia* (Ulbert 1990, 24-26, 32-33, Abb. 18, Taf. 4a, 25a; Paris 2001, no. 87). This iconographic type is not represented in Syriac manuscript illumination, although it can be found in a manuscript from the Syrian region: Queen Melisende's Psalter, made in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, Scriptorium of the Holy Sepulchre, ca 1135 (Buchthal 1957, 9, 10, Pl. 17b; Hunt 2000b, 117, Fig. 18).

⁵² Wall paintings: Kfar Schleiman, Cave Church of Saydet-Naia (Hélou 1999, 23, Pl. 26; Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 214, 306-307, 392-383; Immerzeel 2000, no. 9). Qara, Church of Mar Sarkis (St Sergius), before 1266 (Hunt 2000b, 80, 110, Fig. 4; Velmans 1999, 63, Fig. 56; Westphalen 2000, 496, Abb. 26); Bethlehem, Church of the Nativity, twelfth century (Kühnel 1988, 22-26, Pls 7-8).

⁵³ Wall paintings: Barghun, ruined Church of Mart Barbara, thirteenth century (Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 297-298, 368; Immerzeel 2000, no. 6). Manuscript illumination: Paris, Bibl. Nat. Syr. 341, sixth/seventh century (Leroy 1964, Pl. 43,2).

⁵⁴ Wall paintings: Beirut, National Museum, paintings removed from the remains of the Church of the Saviour, or Mart Barbara (Nordiguian/Voisin 1999, 371-372; Immerzeel 2000, no. 27, Fig. 13; Hunt 2000b, 84-85, Fig. 9); Bethlehem, column painting in the Church of the Nativity, twelfth century (Kühnel 1988, 26-28, Fig. 18). Ms: Berlin, Preuss. Bibl. Sachau 220, twelfth/thirteenth century (Leroy 1964, Pl. 117,1; 117,3).

⁵⁵ Folda 1982, Figs 18, 19; Folda 1995, 403, Figs 9.37j, 9.37k.

⁵⁶ Folda 1995, 404.

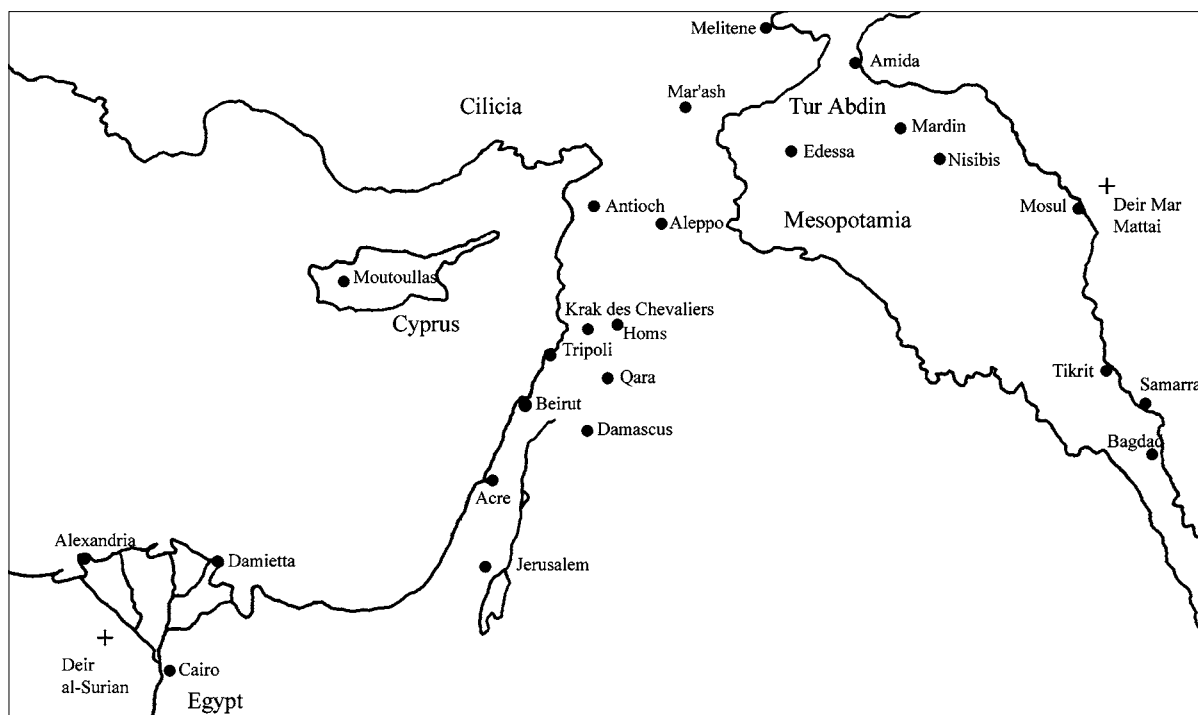


Fig. 2. Map of the Middle East

of the Panagia at Moutoullas, Cyprus (1280), though not in the Syrian region proper, should be included here for stylistic reasons⁵⁷. The Virgin is sitting on a high-backed, bejewelled throne of which only the right side has survived. She wears a *maphorion* and holds the Child in her left arm and gestures toward him with her right. Christ, dressed in a tunic covered by a mantle, is facing his mother. In his left hand he holds a scroll, and with his right hand he makes the sign of blessing. The abbreviated name of the Virgin is written in Greek (MHP ΘΥ), only the last two letters of which remain. The Hodegetria is sitting under a decorated arch. Such arches, which are usually shown resting on columns to form an arcade, are common in Byzantine art. However, this one is distinguished by a white zigzagging interlaced pattern filled with hexagon shapes in the alternating colours red, white, and/or green⁵⁸. Arches with this characteristic

pattern can be found in several churches within the Syrian region⁵⁹. This particular motif is said to have been derived from Seljuk art, and as such it may be considered a regional innovation. The only examples found outside this area are in the Church of the Panagia at Moutoullas; thus for stylistic reasons this may be assumed to have been painted by a Syrian artist.

The two wall paintings are the only surviving examples of the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria in monumental art within the Syrian region, or in the case of the version on Cyprus, possibly painted by a Syrian artist. Again, although these examples represent the same theme as is found on the central medallion of our flabellum, there are no specific iconographic or stylistic similarities. Such similarities can be found, however, in two thirteenth-century Syriac manuscripts produced in North Mesopotamia.

VATICAN SYR. 559 AND BRITISH LIBRARY
ADD. 7170

Since the flabellum was used in Deir al-Surian, at that time a stronghold of the West Syrian community in Egypt (see below), it is all the more signifi-

⁵⁷ Mouriki 1984, 191, Fig. 10; Mouriki 1995, 403, Fig. 165.

⁵⁸ The image of a standing Christ on the south pier of the iconostasis in the Church of the Panagia at Moutoullas is also placed under an arch decorated with this characteristic pattern (Mouriki 1984, 191, Fig. 29).

⁵⁹ These are listed in: Immerzeel 2004b.

cant that the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria depicted on it finds a close iconographic parallel in a version of the same theme featured in two manuscripts that were made for the Syrian Orthodox Church: a lectionary in the Vatican library (Vat. Syr. 559), which was made at the Monastery of Mar Mattai near Mosul in North Mesopotamia (1219-1220), and the related lectionary (ca 1220) in the British Library (Add. 7170; Pl. 4; Fig. 2), made either in the same monastery, or in an affiliated one, possibly Mar Hanania (Deir al-Zaʿfaran) near Mardin⁶⁰. All previous publications on these manuscripts have pointed out that even though the imagery is clearly dependent on the Byzantine tradition, the illustrations in these two lectionaries have largely been Arabised⁶¹. The stylistic features, in particular, show a clear affinity with secular Arab manuscripts executed in the so-called Mesopotamian school, such as three manuscripts of al-Hariri's *Maqamat* (*Assemblies*) in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris: arabe 6094 (1222/23), arabe 5847 (1237), and arabe 3929 (undated). This similarity is most obvious in the treatment of the faces, which are broad with elongated eyes, a very small mouth and nose, eyebrows marked by an s-line and thin moustaches. All these features are illustrated in a miniature representing Constantine and Helena in the Vatican lectionary (fol. 223v)⁶². Other characteristic facial types are more 'Semitic', with triangular faces, a hooked nose and a pointed beard. For instance, the figure of Caiaphas in the scene of Christ's trial, in the London lectionary (fol. 145r), may be compared with the figure of Abu Zayd in a miniature in MS arabe 5847 (fol. 107)⁶³. Not only are Caiaphas' facial features derived from Islamic art, but the whole arrangement of the scene is an adaptation of the Islamic model for representing the Qadi in trial scenes. This also brings us to the point that the everyday objects of furniture, dress and turbans depicted in these two lectionaries all seem to reflect contemporary life. The Syrian artists involved in the production of Vat. Syr. 559 and Add. 7170 clearly drew on a variety of sources.

The images of the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria depicted in these manuscripts exhibit the same eclecticism⁶⁴. Their basic iconographic features, such as the gesture of the Virgin and the position of the Christ-child, are derived from Byzantine examples, but the setting and the style of the images is clearly 'Islamic'. In the London lectionary (Pl. 5), the Virgin Hodegetria is set against a golden back-

ground and framed by a trefoil niche. The Virgin is seated on a high-backed, cushioned throne, wearing a grey tunic and a red maphorion. Mary bends her head slightly in the direction of the cross-nimbed Child, supporting him with her left hand and pointing to him with her right. Christ is turned towards his mother. He is dressed in a dark grey tunic and a pink mantle. In his left hand he holds a scroll, and with his right he makes the sign of blessing. Although the Child is probably meant to be interpreted sitting, it looks as if he is standing. As there is no footstool, the Virgin's feet seem to dangle in the air. The lower half of the red throne is decorated with an arabesque, while the green rectangular backrest is ornamented with a decorative pattern. Both sides of the backrest end in a golden triangular form which projects sideways. On the seat is a cushion with golden ends, covered with a small carpet which has a lilac and purple border. The miniature has a Syriac inscription consisting of two words placed on either side of the Virgin's head. They are written from top to bottom and read: *Mother of God*. This image is repeated in the Vatican lectionary with some minor differences, mainly in the use of colour: the Virgin has a blue tunic and a brown maphorion, while the Child is dressed in a green tunic and a purple mantle. The lower half of the red throne is decorated with alternating hexagons, while the green backrest is ornamented with crosses. The small carpet which is spread out over the cushion has a golden border. The miniature is not supplied with an inscription.

The so-called Arab influence is not only visible in the aforementioned stylistic aspects; another obvious Arab inspiration is the shape of the throne on which Mary is seated. Similar thrones appear several times in both lectionaries, usually in connection with a ruler: for instance, Caiaphas in the miniature depicting Christ's trial (Add. 7170,

⁶⁰ Vat. Syr. 559, f. 17r: Leroy 1964, 283, Pl. 77,4; exhibited in Paris 2001, no. 90. London, B.L. Add. 7170, f. 24r: Leroy 1964, 304, Pl. 77,3.

⁶¹ Buchthal 1939; Leroy 1964, 301, 399, 434-435; Leroy 1971, 253-254; Evans/Wixom 1997, 385, no. 254; Hunt 2000c, 160-161.

⁶² Leroy 1964, Pl. 99,2.

⁶³ Leroy 1964, Pl. 89,4; Buchthal 1939, Pl. XXIII,2.

⁶⁴ London, B.L. Add. 7170, Fol. 24r: Leroy 1964, 304, Pl. 77,3. Vat. Syr. 559, Fol. 17r: Leroy 1964, 283, Pl. 77,4; Paris 2001, no. 90 (in colour).



Pl. 4. Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria. British Library Add. 7170, fol. 24r
(Photo: By permission of The British Library)

fol. 145r)⁶⁵, or Herod in the Massacre of the Innocents (Vat. Syr. 559, fol. 18v)⁶⁶. The distinctive feature of the projecting triangles is also used for the throne depicted in the evangelist portrait of St John in Add. 7170 (fol. 6r)⁶⁷. Such thrones, with rectangular backs and decorated with these same

protruding triangles, are unknown in the Byzantine tradition, but are widespread in Islamic art. They are an essential part of the secular Islamic iconography of the enthroned ruler, represented in all sorts of artistic media such as pottery, manuscript illumination and metalwork⁶⁸. Since this is not the place to discuss the origin and the development of this motif in detail, we will restrict ourselves to a more general remark. It should be noted that in contrast to the version featured on the flabellum and in the two Syriac lectionaries, these thrones generally seem to be represented either with rather small legs, or with none at all, thus with the seat near the ground. The d'Arenberg basin (ca 1247-1249) in the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. has an interesting parallel for such a low throne. One of the roundels on the exterior contains an image of the *Dexiokratousa* between two angels⁶⁹. Although this version was probably copied from a model showing the Virgin on a long-legged throne, here she is

⁶⁵ Leroy 1964, Pl. 89,4.

⁶⁶ Leroy 1964, Pl. 78,3.

⁶⁷ Leroy 1964, Pl. 71,1.

⁶⁸ For instance: Ettinghausen 1962, 91 (plate); Baer 1989, Pl. 104; Evans/Wixom 1997, no. 287. Another type of throne that enjoyed relative popularity among Muslim dignitaries is the *sella curulis*, the folding stool formerly used by Roman emperors on state occasions. It is depicted in several manuscript illuminations from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Bolman 2002, 124). In two frontispieces from the *Book of Songs* dating from 1218/1219, for instance, Badr al-Din Lu'Lu', the ruler of Mosul, is sitting on such a seat (Vol. 4: Farès 1961, Pl. 8. Vol. 17: Ettinghausen 1962, 65).

⁶⁹ Baer 1989, Pl. 65.

depicted sitting cross-legged on a low stool. In the Byzantine tradition, the enthroned Virgin is usually seated on a high-backed throne, resting her feet on an arched footstool, just as in any other Byzantine religious or secular throne scene. Even though the crossed-legged position makes such a piece of furniture highly inappropriate, the artist has nevertheless chosen to depict this detail. It has, however, become a small rectangular box probably only used to fill space (*horror vacui*)⁷⁰.

This brings us to another motif depicted on the flabellum from Deir al-Surian: the arc on which the Virgin rests her feet. Iconographic parallels are not found within the Islamic context; as has already been mentioned, a footstool would be inappropriate with a low throne and a cross-legged position. However, footstools are widespread within the Christian tradition, they are usually rectangular, but occasionally arched. A Coptic manuscript, dating from 989-990, contains a miniature of the enthroned Virgin *Galactotrophousa* in which she rests her feet on a semicircular carpet (or footstool) decorated with small circles⁷¹. Both above mentioned Syriac lectionaries feature the Communion of the Apostles, in which Christ sits on a backless throne resting his feet on a rounded cushion⁷². Another parallel is offered by Ascension scenes, a contemporary example of which is the apse painting at the Karanlin kilise (ca 1200-1210) in Göreme, Cappadocia, in which Christ sits on a large rainbow, resting his feet on a smaller one⁷³. As the Virgin on the flabellum is not depicted sitting on a rainbow, it is unlikely that the arc on which she rests her feet is meant to be taken as one. The Christ in Majesty, painted in the upper level of the (eastern) apse of the Church of St Anthony (1232/1233) near the Red Sea, offers the best comparable example to our motif. Here the enthroned Christ rests his feet on an arc inscribed with the following words: '*Behold, heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool*' (Isaiah 66:1)⁷⁴. This leads to the conclusion that the particular type of throne represented on the flabellum and in the two Syriac lectionaries stems from Islamic tradition, while the arc on which the Virgin rests her feet is clearly derived from Christian models.

THE FREER CANTEEN

From the point of view of iconography and composition, the most eye-catching analogies are not

with the two Syriac lectionaries, but with the canteen held at the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., dating from around the mid-thirteenth century (Pl. 5)⁷⁵. This object is part of the group of inlaid bronzes referred to in the introduction. It is mainly Christian in iconography but Islamic in style. Generally the canteen is assigned to Syria or North Mesopotamia. Its similarity to the flabellum is particularly noteworthy because the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria is again featured on a piece of metalwork, and placed within a central medallion.

The front of the canteen is slightly convex with a small depression in the centre representing the Virgin and Child, flanked by two saints and with two pairs of angels placed above and below the throne. This central medallion is framed by three panels with scenes from the life of Christ: (counter-clockwise from the spout) the Nativity, the Presentation in the Temple and the Entry into Jerusalem. The formal models for these representations were probably derived from contemporary Syriac manuscripts, such as the two lectionaries made for the Syrian Orthodox Church⁷⁶. Although it is not entirely clear, the Virgin depicted in the central medallion is probably wearing a tunic and a maphorion⁷⁷. Looking straight out at the viewer, she holds the cross-nimbed Child on her left arm. Her right hand is raised in front of her chest. Christ, dressed in a long tunic, is turned toward his mother, seeming to stand rather than sit on her lap. The infant's right hand is raised, but does not assume the usual gesture signifying blessing. It is also significant that the scroll that Christ usually holds

⁷⁰ Baer 1989, 30-31.

⁷¹ London, British Museum, or. 6782, fol. 1v: Leroy 1974b, 105, Pl. 29,1.

⁷² Leroy 1964, 307, Pl. 89,1; 292, Pl. 89,2.

⁷³ Restle 1967 II, Fig. 240.

⁷⁴ Van Moorsel 1995/97, 43, Pls 21-22; Bolman 2002, 65, Fig. 4.28. The same motif, again inscribed with the words from Isaiah 66:1, is represented in the wall painting with the Deesis Vision in the side chapel, which is almost identical to the Christ in Majesty in the sanctuary apse: Van Moorsel 1995/97, 170, Pls 102-103; Bolman 2002, 74, Fig. 4.38.

⁷⁵ Schneider 1973; Atil/Chase/Jett 1985, no. 17; Baer 1989, 19-21; Khoury 1998.

⁷⁶ The prototypes have been studied in detail by Schneider (1973).

⁷⁷ According to Baer (1989, 32) the Virgin wears a turban-like headdress instead of the traditional veil.



Pl. 5. Freer canteen (Photo: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase, F1941.10)

in his left hand is not shown. The same omissions were noted above when describing the infant on the flabellum. The elaborate throne has drapery covering its legs, a large cushion on the seat, and two posts flanking the high back. The saint in attendance on the left wears a turban and has his hands raised in the gesture of adoration with open palms. The figure on the right is a bearded man who holds an undefined object. The two angels below the throne, flying upwards in opposite directions, appear to be carrying the object. They may have

been inspired by Ascension scenes in which similar angels carry Christ's mandorla heavenwards, such as those found in the two Syriac lectionaries⁷⁸.

An interesting iconographic detail, which again links this rendering of the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria to the one on the flabellum, is the pair of angels hovering above the throne. Whereas on the flabellum there is the suggestion that they are holding Mary's halo, in this composition they are unmistakably holding it with both hands. According to Eva Baer this motif has no roots in Byzantine models⁷⁹. The resemblance to the flying genii holding a canopy or diadem above the head of the secular Arabic ruler, a very popular theme in contemporary Syrian and Mesopotamian metalwork

⁷⁸ Leroy 1964, Pls 95,1; 95,2.

⁷⁹ Baer 1989, 32.

and manuscript illumination, leads her to conclude that the origin of this image should be sought within Islamic art⁸⁰. However, it must be noted that this motif fully conforms to the Early Christian theme representing two horizontal flying angels with outstretched arms holding a medallion containing a cross. This well-known iconographic formula was derived from pagan models in the fourth century, and it remained very popular up until the Middle Ages. Although this motif is extremely common, and as such does not need any reference, there are a number of sixth-century Byzantine ivory carvings which we would like to compare to the canteen, such as the diptych from the Etchmiadzin Gospel⁸¹. The central panel on the front cover represents the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria flanked by two angels. The long horizontal panel above depicts two flying angels bearing aloft a wreath containing a cross. The related diptych in the Museo Nazionale at Ravenna features the same composition, though admittedly there the enthroned Christ is featured in the central panel⁸². More recent examples are a Coptic manuscript from the early tenth century with two flying angels holding a medallion with the bust of Christ above an image of the enthroned Virgin *Galactotrophousa*⁸³, and the two standing angels holding a medallion with a cross on the west façade of the Church of the Holy Cross at Aghtamar (915-921) near Lake Van, Turkey⁸⁴. These few examples demonstrate that the two flying angels bearing a medallion aloft are often placed above the image of an enthroned Virgin or Christ. From this it would be only a small step to lower the motif and to depict the angels on either side of the enthroned figure, thereby transforming the medallion into a halo. Although this has to remain a hypothesis, as no direct prototypes are known for this composition, it would seem very likely that this Christian motif was the main source of inspiration for the two flying angels holding the Virgin's halo as seen on the Freer canteen.

The above hypothesis is credible, but the following explanation is perhaps more convincing. On the flabellum, the two angels hovering above the throne would seem to be holding Mary's halo, as was remarked on earlier. This could be explained by the fact that the artist had relatively little room in which to portray the two angels⁸⁵. In Byzantine prototypes, such as the ivory panel depicting the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria in Chambéry (see

above), the same attendant angels, with arms outstretched, hover above the throne. These angels are further away from the central figure of Mary, and thereby the inference that they are holding her halo is avoided. As has already been noted, the craftsmanship of the flabellum is poor, lacking expertise in the layout of the composition. This, in turn, may explain the fact that the angels' hands slightly cross the edge of the Virgin's halo. It is possible that this chance illustration developed naturally into the composition as the one found on the Freer canteen. This hypothesis requires that the flabellum should also have been produced in Northern Mesopotamia, as will be argued below. The obvious similarities with the Freer canteen indicate that an iconographic model consisting of an enthroned Virgin Hodegetria in a central medallion with two angels hovering above the throne was in use in the metal workshops of Syria and Northern Mesopotamia in the first half of the thirteenth century. In an article

⁸⁰ The two flying genii holding up a diadem or canopy indeed formed an integral part of the Islamic iconography of the secular ruler. As such, they were depicted in various artistic media. Metalwork with flying genii: penbox, Benaki Museum, Athens, dated 1220 (Baer 1989, Pl. 104); ewer, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, dated 1232 (Rice 1957, Fig. 3); candlestick, Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, inv. 15.121, first half thirteenth century; tray, Hermitage, St. Petersburg, first half thirteenth century (Amsterdam 1999, no. 123); candlestick, Metropolitan Museum, New York, late thirteenth century (Kühnel 1939, Abb. 13); basin, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, dated 1252; basin, Archaeological Museum, Teheran, dated 1275 [both on the inside bottom and the outside surface] (Baer 1989, Pl. 91; Guest/Ettinghausen 1984, Figs 23-24); stand, formerly Arthur Sambon collection, second half thirteenth century (Guest/Ettinghausen 1984, Fig. 21); candlestick, Keir collection, first half thirteenth century (Féhervári 1976, Pl. 41b). Manuscript illumination: see, for instance, five frontispieces of the *Book of Songs* (1217-1219): Vol. 4. (Farès 1961, Pl. 8); Vol. 11 (Farès 1961, Pl. 1); Vol. 17 (Farès 1961, Pl. 10; Ettinghausen 1962, 65); Vol. 19 (Farès 1961, Pl. 11; R. Hillenbrand 1999, Fig. 100); Vol. 20 (Farès 1961, Pl. 12).

⁸¹ Volbach 1976, no. 142, Pl. 75.

⁸² Volbach 1976, no. 125, Pl. 39.

⁸³ Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 600; Leroy 1974b, 102, Pl. 36.

⁸⁴ Der Nersessian 1965, 12, Fig. 5.

⁸⁵ It is not unusual for the space available to influence the composition. This can be seen clearly in the eleventh-century Byzantine ivory panel in Trier, where the Hodegetria is shown standing. (Goldschmidt/Weitzmann 1979, no. 116, Pl. XLIII). Due to the lack of space the attending angels seem to be holding Mary's halo.

partly dedicated to the motif of the angel in courtly Islamic iconography, Dorothy Shepherd suggests that the pair of flying angels holding a diadem above the image of a royal figure reflect the influence of local Christian art⁸⁶. If we accept her suggestion, it is reasonable to assume that the composition of the central medallion as it appears on the flabellum had a significant influence in this regard.

STYLE AND INSCRIPTION LANGUAGE

It was mentioned above that while the image of the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria depicted in the two Syriac lectionaries and on the Freer canteen is in accordance with the Eastern Christian tradition, the style in which they are executed is Islamic. The same applies to the decoration on the flabellum from Deir al-Surian. It should, however, be emphasised that the use of the Islamic style does not necessarily imply that the artist responsible was Muslim. He may well have been a local Christian who was fully aware of the stylistic trends in his surrounding artistic milieu.

Apart from the background design consisting of regularly winding floral spirals, a common feature of thirteenth-century metalwork from Syria and North Mesopotamia, the Islamic influence is most clearly to be seen in the modelling of the faces and the hairstyles. The facial features, especially those of the Virgin, have been 'mongolised'; one can note, for instance, the almond-shaped eyes. These features are familiar from a group of secular Arabic manuscripts generally attributed to North Mesopotamia (Mosul), which are often described as Seljuk in style⁸⁷:

1. *Kitāb al-Diryāq* (*Book of Antidotes*), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Arabe 2964, dated 1199.
2. *Kitāb al-Diryāq*, Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, A.F. 10, first half of the thirteenth century.
3. Six volumes of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (*Book of Songs*) belonging to one copy. Vols 2, 4, 11: Cairo, National Library, Adab 579; Vols 17, 19:

Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, Feyzullah Efendi, 1566 and 1565; Vol. 20: Copenhagen, Royal Library, Ar.MS.168. Vol. 11 is dated 1217 and Vol. 20 1219.

Although each manuscript demonstrates three different facial types side by side, only one will be discussed here. This particular type can be seen in the facial features of the four *genii* and the cross-legged female figure holding a crescent, the composition is repeated twice on the double frontispiece miniatures of the *Kitāb al-Diryāq* in Paris, which was most probably produced in Mosul⁸⁸. The face is round. The eyebrow is a semicircular line placed relatively high above the eye and slightly turned up at the end. The almond-shaped eye is extended by a straight line. The shoulder-length hair is parted in the middle, forming a pointed arch. The same facial features appear in the Vienna version of the *Kitāb al-Diryāq*, thought to have been executed in Mosul in the first half of the thirteenth century⁸⁹, and in the frontispieces of the six surviving volumes of the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, which were made for a ruler of Mosul between 1217 and 1219. One example can be seen on the frontispiece to volume 17 in Istanbul, which shows the enthroned ruler with attendants, and two flying *genii* holding a canopy over his head⁹⁰.

Although they are executed in different artistic media, the affinity between this group of manuscripts and the flabellum from Deir al-Surian is evident. The stylistic analogies are found in the broad faces with slanted eyes, the typical eyebrows, and delicate mouths. It even looks as if the typical hair style, in the shape of a pointed arch, has been transferred to the figure of Mary on the flabellum. This is particularly interesting, given that the Virgin Mary's hair is usually never visible because she wears a maphorion. One minor difference is that the line that forms both eyebrows is used to form her nose, while in the manuscripts only one eyebrow continues on to form the nose. All in all, it may be concluded that the manuscripts and the flabellum were produced in the same stylistic tradition. Does this imply that the artist who executed the decoration on the flabellum was himself a Muslim?

As we have mentioned before, the flabellum is decorated with an inscription written in Syriac. This is very important within the scope of a study on the interrelationship between Islamic and Christian art. Syriac was a literary and theological language used

⁸⁶ Shepherd 1974, 88 n. 11, 90-92.

⁸⁷ For the stylistic and iconographic analogies between metalwork and manuscript illumination produced in North Mesopotamia, see: Nassar 1985.

⁸⁸ Farès 1953, Pls III-IV; R. Hillenbrand 1999, Fig. 99.

⁸⁹ Ettinghausen 1962, 91 (plate), 92.

⁹⁰ Ettinghausen 1962, 64, 65 (plate).

only by Christians and not by Muslims⁹¹. This may lead us to conclude that the craftsman who made this object was probably a Christian himself. However, some additional comments must be made on this hypothesis. Since there is no artist's inscription, it cannot be ascertained that a single craftsman produced the object. The flabellum could well have been made by at least two artists: for instance, a decorator and a person who formed the basic artefact. In fact, labour division seems to have been common practice in the metalworking industry in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Several contemporary inlaid bronzes are supplied with inscriptions in which the artist who constructed the shape and the design of the object is differentiated from the one who executed the inlays, i.e. the decoration⁹². Another notion that one needs to bear in mind is the possibility that a Muslim artist traced the different letters on the disk – a task, which in the case of the inscription in the medallion, was not done flawlessly⁹³. Be that as it may, the flabellum, with its Syriac inscription and Christian imagery executed in an Islamic style, at least seems to indicate that Muslims and Christians worked side by side in the same metal workshops to produce works of art for their local patrons, Muslim and Christian alike. This is not only true of the metal workshops: Erica Cruikshank Dodd has already shown that during the period under discussion, both Christians and Muslims in Syria and Lebanon painted in the same style and often belonged to the same workshops⁹⁴.

THE GREATER HISTORICAL CONTEXT

From the inscription on the flabellum, it can be deduced that this object and its supposed counterpart were produced for Deir al-Surian (see Appendix). Since it was found in Egypt, the fan must indeed have reached its destination. To shed some light on its likely origin from the Mosul area, we have to turn to the history of Deir al-Surian's contacts with North Mesopotamia, in particular around the turn of the twelfth century and within the greater context of the historical events of that period, i.e. with respect to the situation within the Syrian Orthodox Church and the political conditions.

The survival of the West Syrian community in the Wadi al-Natrun always depended on a permanent influx of new monks from Syrian Orthodox

centres abroad. For centuries Mesopotamia was its most important breeding-ground. The Syrian presence in Deir al-Surian started in the early ninth century with the arrival of monks from the city of Takrit in Central Mesopotamia (Fig. 2)⁹⁵. A remarkable flourishing occurred during the lifetime of Moses of Nisibis, who was the abbot of Deir al-Surian from ca 906/907 until ca 943⁹⁶. He came from Nisibis, about 250 km northwest of Mosul. Moses continued the traditional contacts with Central Mesopotamia. In 932 he returned to his monastery from a voyage to this area, bringing with him about 250 manuscripts. This event testifies to the extreme importance of Deir al-Surian and its library for the Syrian Orthodox Church from the tenth century onwards⁹⁷.

The first reference to a person from Mosul is found in a Syriac inscription on the south wall inside the Church of al-ʿAdra. In the period between 932 and 940 (A.H. 32[.]), thus during the time of Abbot Moses' tenure, the monk Petros son of Ishaq from Mosul was in the monastery, although it remains an open question whether he came as a passing visitor or was a resident of the community⁹⁸. In 1063 (A.H. 455), Yuhannon (John), probably from Amid (Diyarbakir in Tûr ʿAbdîn, Southeast Turkey), came to Deir al-Surian. His name and the date of his arrival are recorded in a second inscription on the south wall⁹⁹.

The remarkably high quantity of data recorded in manuscripts from Deir al-Surian and in inscriptions on the walls of its church from the second half of the twelfth century and the first half of the thirteenth suggests that this was a flourishing period

⁹¹ Leroy 1971, 133.

⁹² Atil/Chase/Jett 1985, 11-12; Blair 1998, 119, 121.

⁹³ It should be noted that these mistakes cannot simply be explained resulting from a Muslim artist unfamiliar with the Syriac language, as mistakes and misspellings are a common feature on Islamic metalware (Blair 1998, 112).

⁹⁴ Cruikshank Dodd 2001, 117-123.

⁹⁵ Van Rompay/Schmidt 2001b, 46-47.

⁹⁶ Innemée/Van Rompay 1998; Van Rompay 2000; Van Rompay/Schmidt 2001; den Heijer 2004; Immerzeel 2004a, all with references to older studies.

⁹⁷ Fiey 1972-1973, 340-341; Leroy 1974, 152-153; Innemée/Van Rompay 1998, 191-193; Immerzeel 2004a, 1312.

⁹⁸ Jenner/Van Rompay 1998, 96-99, Fig. 15; Van Rompay 1999, §5, text e; Van Rompay 2000, 81.

⁹⁹ Innemée/Van Rompay 2000, §24, Inscr. 16, fig. 4; Van Rompay 2000, 81.

with an important influx of monks from the North. The references to these monks are, summarized in chronological order, as follows:

- 1165/1166 or 1155/1156 (A.G. 1477 or 1467): an incomplete text in the nave, to the left of the doorway giving access to the *khurus*, seems to refer to restoration works after a period with difficulties, in which there was no Syrian priest in the monastery for a full ten years¹⁰⁰.
- 1190: on the final page of a manuscript from Deir al-Surian containing the *Homilies* of Patriarch Severus of Antioch, a note is added by Patriarch Michael I (1166-1199). He had this copy sent from Egypt to the Monastery of Mar Barsaumo near Melitene, now Malatya in Turkey¹⁰¹. Not only does this text testify to intensive contacts between the monks of Deir al-Surian and West Syrians at long distance, it also demonstrates Michael's familiarity with the monastery's important manuscript collection. It would appear that the patriarch had access to whatever he needed from the library, and could do with it as he wished; the manuscript was obviously brought back to the Wadi al-Natrun afterwards.
- 1194 (A.G. 1505): a scribal note in a manuscript mentions the arrival of "*a monk with many companions*"¹⁰². This monk, according to Evelyn White perhaps Zakhe from Deir Mar Mattai near Mosul, restores many manuscripts in the library and orders new ones.

- 1199 (A.G. 1511): Zakhe copies a collection of *Histories of Saints and Martyrs*¹⁰³.
- 1202/03 (A.G. 1514): dedicative inscription on the flabellum.
- 1206 (A.G. 1517): a scribal note in a manuscript refers to the arrival of another group: "*In 1517 in the month Nisan we, twelve brethren from Syria, entered the Monastery of the Syrians in the desert of Scetis*"¹⁰⁴.
- 1209: the monks Zakhe and John of Deir Mar Mattai donate several manuscripts to the library¹⁰⁵. The presence of forty Syrian monks in Egypt is mentioned in a letter from Patriarch Michael II of Antioch (1207-1215) to Patriarch Yuhanna VI ibn Abi Ghalib of Alexandria (1189-1216). Furthermore, Michael II states that the Monastery of the Syrians in the Scetis, and its superior, are under Yuhanna's orders and subject to his judgments¹⁰⁶.
- 1211: the monk and priest Lazarus from Tûr ʿAbdîn presents a copy of the Gospels which he has restored on the occasion of a visit to Egypt¹⁰⁷.
- ca 1235-1245: According to a scribal note, Rabban Mattai of Tûr ʿAbdîn was the author of several texts¹⁰⁸.
- 1237: the presence of forty Syrian monks and a Syrian superior is mentioned in a letter addressed by Patriarch Cyrillus III of Alexandria (1235-1243) to Patriarch Ignatius II of Antioch (1222-1252)¹⁰⁹.
- 1248-1257: the activities of the scribe Rabban Bacchus al-Bakhdidy from the Monastery of the Hermits in Edessa are set down in several manuscripts¹¹⁰.
- 1264: two quires in a copy of the Gospels are written by ʿAziz, again from Deir Mar Mattai¹¹¹.

During the period under consideration, Coptic scribes were also active in Deir al-Surian¹¹². Evidently the monastery had a mixed population, but all inhabitants fully depended on the Coptic patriarch. This administrative arrangement may have been created in the ninth century, and finds confirmation in Patriarch Michael II's letter from 1209, in which he puts 'his' monks in the monastery in the hand of his Coptic colleague, Patriarch Yuhanna VI¹¹³.

Immigrants from North Mesopotamia whose names have been eternalised came from Tûr ʿAbdîn, Edessa, and Deir Mar Mattai. With regard to the date on the flabellum, the records from the years preceding and after 1202/03 are particularly

¹⁰⁰ Jenner/Van Rompay 1998, 99-101, Fig. 16, Innémée/Van Rompay 1998, 175-176, 189; Van Rompay 1999, §5, Inscr. g.

¹⁰¹ Wright 1871, Add 14,577; Van Rompay 2000, 85.

¹⁰² Wright 1871, no. DCXXV, 497; Evelyn White 1932, 383, 448.

¹⁰³ Wright 1871, no. DCCCCLXI; Evelyn White 1932, 448.

¹⁰⁴ Wright 1871, no. XXIII, 15; Evelyn White, 1932, 383.

¹⁰⁵ Wright 1871, no. MXXVII; Evelyn White 1932, 448; Bigoul el-Souriany 2004, 289.

¹⁰⁶ Fiey 1972-1973, 354, 360; den Heijer 2004, 937 note 67.

¹⁰⁷ Evelyn White 1932, 448.

¹⁰⁸ Wright 1871, no. DCXCVI, 580; Evelyn White 1932, 389 note 2, 449.

¹⁰⁹ Fiey 1972-1973, 356 note 295; Den Heijer 2004, 937 note 67.

¹¹⁰ Wright 1870, 141b, 142b, 171b, 380a-b, Evelyn White 1932, 449; Bigoul el-Souriany 2004, 285.

¹¹¹ Evelyn White 1932, 450; Bigoul el-Souriany 2004, 285.

¹¹² Bigoul el-Souriany 2004, 285.

¹¹³ Den Heijer 2004, 933-938.

instructive. In 1199 the Monk Zakhe from Deir Mar Mattai worked as a scribe in Deir al-Surian. We do not know with certainty whether he indeed arrived in 1194, as suggested by Evelyn White, but his name turns up again in 1209 in connection with a donation of manuscripts, together with the name of John, also from Deir Mar Mattai. Apparently Zakhe was in Deir al-Surian between 1199 and 1209 at least. One may suggest that he, and perhaps some other fathers, maintained contacts with their previous community in Deir Mar Mattai. Since this monastery is situated in the vicinity of Mosul, its importance in the period under discussion deserves further consideration.

In the thirteenth century, Deir Mar Mattai, the Monastery of St Matthew, was a major centre of erudition¹¹⁴ and ecclesiastic power. It also played a role in the difficulties that divided the Syrian Orthodox Church at that moment. In 1155, the dioceses of Takrit, Mosul and Deir Mar Mattai were merged, and from that moment onwards the monastery was the see of the maphrian, the second in authority after the patriarch. Until then, the maphrian had resided in Takrit¹¹⁵. The maphrian at the turn of the century was Gregory I (1189-1214). He was a nephew of Patriarch Michael I (1166-1199), and one of several members of Michael's family placed in strategic positions within the hierarchy of the Church¹¹⁶. This appointment led to a schism, because the patriarch ignored the preference of the local church authorities, the monks of Deir Mar Mattai, and the civil dignitaries of Takrit and Mosul¹¹⁷. Nepotism did not end with the death of Michael, because Maphrian Gregory ordained his brother Josuah as his uncle's successor, Michael II (1199-1215)¹¹⁸. This again led to disagreement; the bishops selected Athanasius IX (1199-1207)¹¹⁹, and as a result of this struggle for power there were now two patriarchs. Athanasius was succeeded by Yuhanna XIV (1208-1222), though here too not without difficulties; the candidate tried to escape and had to be ordained by force¹²⁰. His successor Patriarch Ignatius II (1222-1252) had no competitors and received a letter from his Coptic counterpart in 1237 (see above).

It should be noted that the letter from 1209 quoted above, concerning the Coptic jurisdiction over the Syrian monks in Deir al-Surian, was written by Michael II, not the unhappy Yuhanna XIV. Was Michael's action an effort to establish his own authority, or did the Coptic patriarch regard him as

his official counterpart? One wonders if the donation of manuscripts by monks from Deir Mar Mattai to Deir al-Surian in the same year was related to the internal struggle in the Syrian Orthodox Church. The same question can be asked with regard to the flabellum, which, as is suggested above, may have been a donation as well.

Another influential factor in the prosperity of Deir al-Surian is to be sought in the political circumstances at the turn of the century¹²¹. In 1171 Saladin abolished the Fatimid caliphate; three years later, he took over power in Egypt and founded the Ayyubid state. During Ayyubid rule, Egypt, Syria and part of the crusader states were unified. The Ayyubid approach to the delicate balance in the relations with the crusader states resulted in a warless period between 1192 and 1218. Lucy-Anne Hunt describes the Ayyubid's attitude as "(...) a deliberate policy of détente and peaceful coexistence with the Frankish states, in an attempt to maintain the status quo."¹²² All parties involved, including the local Christians, benefited from this stability. The Christians enjoyed tolerance and protection, and participated fully in the flourishing commerce and industry of the state¹²³. In this period, the production of both Christian and Muslim art reached a peak.

The peaceful situation around 1200 created favourable enough circumstances to facilitate the travelling of monks from North Mesopotamia to Egypt. Some of them brought manuscripts from their homeland to enrich the famous library of Deir al-Surian, and it therefore makes sense to suggest that one of them perhaps arrived with the flabellum (or both flabella) in his luggage.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the foregoing analysis, certain conclusions may be drawn as to the iconography, style and provenance of the flabellum from Deir al-Surian.

¹¹⁴ Kawerau 1955, 51.

¹¹⁵ Kawerau 1955, 21.

¹¹⁶ Kawerau 1955, 4, 23, 62; Weltecke 2003, 112-113.

¹¹⁷ Kawerau 1955, 25, 44-46.

¹¹⁸ Kawerau 1955, 63.

¹¹⁹ Kawerau 1955, 14, 38

¹²⁰ Kawerau 1955, 18, 107.

¹²¹ Hunt 1998, 206-209; C. Hillenbrand 1999, 171-225.

¹²² Hunt 1998, 208.

¹²³ Hunt 1998, 209-214.

The central medallion of the flabellum is embellished with an image of the enthroned Virgin Hodegetria, an iconographic type which enjoyed a relative popularity in East Christian art during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It is rather significant that the most striking iconographic parallels are with the Syriac lectionaries in the Vatican Library and the British Library dating from ca 1220, and the Freer canteen in Washington D.C. from the middle of the thirteenth century; the provenance of the two manuscripts is well attested (Deir Mar Mattai near Mosul/Deir Mar Hanania near Mardin), while the piece of inlaid metalwork can be attributed to a workshop in Syria or North Mesopotamia. Furthermore, the stylistic similarities to a group of secular Arab manuscripts contribute additional evidence for attributing the flabellum to North Mesopotamia, possibly Mosul, which was also a main centre for the production of sophisticated metalwork in the thirteenth century. The artist living in North Mesopotamia was familiar with the Islamic artistic tradition of the same region.

The flabellum was made at a moment of obvious cultural activity in Deir al-Surian, mainly by monks from North Mesopotamia. The art-historical research on this object has provided enough elements to support the theory that this region was its place of origin. The references in several manuscripts to the Monk Zakhe from Deir Mar Mattai in the vicinity of Mosul are revealing in this regard. He may have arrived in 1194, but is mentioned for the first time explicitly in 1199, while he also played a role in the donation of manuscripts in 1209. Given the date inscribed on the flabellum, 1202/03, Zakhe and/or other monks from the Mosul area may have been involved in some way in the production or transfer of this object. Perhaps it was a present from relatives, friends, or even the community of Deir Mar Mattai to the brethren living far away from their homeland, in a monastery whose reputation had been established in the West Syrian tradition for centuries.

¹²⁴ A first edition of the main inscription was included in Jules Leroy's article (Leroy 1974/75).

¹²⁵ Leroy's copy of the Syriac text (Leroy 1974-1975, 34) omits the dots below and above the word *w-šawyat* as well as the dots marking the plural on *marwḥê*. In addition, it omits the letter *yod* in the words *da-tlitâyutâ* (first *yod*), *hâlên*, and *d-'Esqîti* (twice).

APPENDIX:

THE SYRIAC TEXTS OF THE FLABELLUM

As noted above, the flabellum has two Syriac inscriptions. The main inscription, containing important historical information, is found on the innermost of the two outer concentric registers. A more modest inscription, consisting of four words, is found in the medallion¹²⁴.

1. Syriac text in the second concentric register

The second concentric register is 2.5-2.7 cm wide. It is entirely covered with an engraved decorative pattern, consisting of a series of winding spirals, from which the inscription protrudes. The text runs all around the flabellum, starting at the bottom, immediately to the right of the holder, and coming to an end at the left of the holder. It is beautifully written in Estrangela, with very little space between the words. The artist was in perfect control of the available space, balancing the text over the length of the register, and creating a perfect harmony between the decorated register and the text.

SYRIAC TEXT¹²⁵

ܠܠܗܘܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܡܬܝܡܢܐ ܕܡܬܝܡܢܐ ܕܡܬܝܡܢܐ
ܕܡܬܝܡܢܐ ܕܡܬܝܡܢܐ ܕܡܬܝܡܢܐ ܕܡܬܝܡܢܐ
ܕܡܬܝܡܢܐ ܕܡܬܝܡܢܐ ܕܡܬܝܡܢܐ ܕܡܬܝܡܢܐ
ܕܡܬܝܡܢܐ ܕܡܬܝܡܢܐ ܕܡܬܝܡܢܐ ܕܡܬܝܡܢܐ

NOTES ON THE TEXT

¹ the final tail of the *qof* is read here as *nun*

² the two words are connected

in writing ܡܬܝܡܢܐ

³ possibly written as ܡܬܝܡܢܐ (see below)

TRANSLATION

"To the glory and the honor of the holy and consubstantial Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, these flabella were made for the Monastery of the House of the Mother of God, Mart(y) Maryam, in the desert of Scetis, the year 1514 of the Greeks."

PALEOGRAPHICAL DATA

The Syriac letters represent the unworked original surface of the flabellum; they slightly protrude from the background which is entirely decorated. The contrast between the writing and the background is

enhanced by a sharp line marking the perimeter of each letter, or combination of letters in cases of connected letters. These lines create the effect of an outline script, leaving empty spaces within the perimeter of the letters.

In spite of this special technique, the Estrangela script runs quite naturally. Its main characteristics may be summarized as follows. The right leg of *'ālaf*, when not connected to the preceding letter, has a heavy “shoe”, while the left leg descends well below the writing line; moreover, most but not all *'ālaf*s have a short extension at the top, standing in a 90 degree position on the oblique stroke. *Dālat* and *rēsh* are always clearly angular; *waw* is always open; *semkat* is not connected to the left. Of the two occurrences of *hē*, the first (initial in *hālēn*) has the Serta form, whereas the second (in *'Alāhā*) is Estrangela. *Shin* has a forked form, resembling *v*. Although the general shape of *taw* is rather uniform (with the small, nearly triangular loop slightly varying in size), there is variation in the ways in which the horizontal and vertical elements cross each other. In some cases the lines of the long vertical stroke cross the horizontal element, while in other cases the opposite effect is created. While a similar crossing of elements within one letter presents itself in the letter *tēt* (which occurs once, in *'Esqiti*), here both lines are interrupted and no effect of crossing is created.

In general, one is dealing with a rather pure Estrangela (with the exception of the one Serta *hē*), the script that continued to be used in biblical manuscripts, as well as in titles and headings, and in all kinds of inscriptions. For most of the characteristics listed above parallels may be found in manuscripts of different periods. The *v*-shape of the *shin* along with the extension at the top of *'ālaf* is found, e.g., in Hatch, plates LXXXIII (1177 AD) and LXXXVIII (1203 AD)¹²⁶, but these two manuscripts have the Serta forms of *dālat*, *rēsh*, *waw*, and *hē*. A pure form of Estrangela, similar to the script of the flabellum, may be found in the “Synodikon inscription” of Deir al-Surian, dated to 1077-1078¹²⁷. There are no Serta letters here, the *shin* is of the *v*-shape, and the *'ālaf* has a heavy “shoe” as well as a thickening at the upper end, resembling the extension found on the flabellum.

Interesting examples of outline script may be found in inscriptions on Syriac manuscript illuminations, e.g., New York, Pierpont Morgan 774 (12th-13th c.)¹²⁸, London, British Library Or.

3372 (ca 1200)¹²⁹, and London, British Library Add. 7170 (ca 1220)¹³⁰. For the latter manuscript, see above, Pl. 4.

FURTHER NOTES

The date

The date is provided at the end of the inscription: “the year 1514 of the Greeks”. As usual in Syriac, a line above the penultimate unit of the inscription, with two dots at its beginning and end and one dot in its middle, indicates that we are dealing with a numeral. As noted already by Leroy¹³¹, the date must be read as *'nyd*, which is 1514. The year 1514 “of the Greeks” (i.e., of the Seleucid era) corresponds to 1202/03 AD. Leroy first hesitated between this date and the date of 1154, written as *'ynd*, which would be 842/43 AD – a date which he thought incompatible with the style of the flabellum. Although in some instances in our inscription *yod* indeed is quite high and is hardly distinct from *nun*, I think that the reading *'ynd* is unlikely, since the first element (*nun*) is slightly higher than the second (*yod*). A much more likely reading in my view would be *'hd*, the *het* being identical to the other occurrences of this letter in the inscription. However, the reading *'hd* does not make sense as a numeral. If this is what the artist wrote, he must have misread the *ny* of his model for *h*. One may safely assume, therefore, with Leroy, that the intended date is 1514, i.e., 1202/03 AD.

The plural form “flabella”

The central term in the inscription is the Syriac word for “flabellum” or “fan”. There can be no doubt that we are dealing with a plural form: *mrwḥ' blyn*. The two dots marking the plural are clearly seen on top of the *rēsh* and the demonstrative pronoun is plural.

In Brockelmann's *Lexicon* no singular form of this word is listed, while for the plural both *marwḥē* and *marwḥâtâ* are mentioned¹³². In spite of

¹²⁶ Hatch 1946.

¹²⁷ Innemée/Van Rompay 2000, par. 26 (Inscription no. 17).

¹²⁸ Leroy 1964, 416-417, Pl. 54.2.

¹²⁹ Leroy 1964, 261-267, Pl. 65-66.

¹³⁰ Leroy 1964, 302-313, Pl. 77.3

¹³¹ Leroy 1974/75, 33.

¹³² Brockelmann 1928, 719a.

the absence of a feminine ending in the first form, both forms may be treated as feminine. The verbal form in our inscription, therefore, should be read as a third person feminine plural (*'ettaqqan* “were constituted, were made”). In Payne Smith’s *Thesaurus* two singular forms are provided, *maruḥâ* (apparently based on an earlier *maruḥâ*) and *marwaḥtâ*, along with the corresponding plural forms: *maruḥê* and *marwḥâtâ*¹³³. Even though most of the examples provided are plural forms, the singular form does occur in the Syriac lexicographical tradition. Moreover, in support of the existence of the singular form the Babylonian Aramaic *marwaḥtâ* may be quoted, which is found as an explanation of the Mishnaic Hebrew *mēnâpâh* “fan”¹³⁴.

It is legitimate, therefore, to assume that the plural form in our inscription, rather than being a merely grammatical *plurale tantum*, in fact refers to more than one flabellum. Further support for this interpretation may be adduced from passages in the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian (d. 1199)¹³⁵ as well as in the *Chronicle to the Year 1234*¹³⁶, where the plural forms clearly denote several flabella. Since the liturgical use of a pair, or pairs, of flabella is well attested and is even depicted in the probably early-thirteenth-century wall painting of the Dormition in the northern dome of the *khurus* of the main church in Deir al-Surian (see Pl. 2), the term in our inscription may safely be assumed to refer to a pair of flabella. A second example, therefore, must once have existed. One may speculate that the second flabellum had a similar inscription, although its decoration may have been different.

For a Syriac inscription referring to several specimens of the same object, there is a parallel in a recently published, undated inscription from Deir al-Surian, engraved on a marble column and referring to “these four columns” (*hâlên 'arbâ 'eṣṭonê*)¹³⁷.

The introductory formula

The formula introducing the text of the inscription

¹³³ Payne Smith II, 1901, 3855.

¹³⁴ Sokoloff 2002, 705a.

¹³⁵ Chabot IV,2, 1910, 644a,3; translation Chabot III,2, 1910, 287b,2. The word *marwḥâtâ* occurs in a list of liturgical objects.

¹³⁶ Chabot 1920, 255,17-19; translation Chabot 1937, 199,34-36. The word *marwḥê* (treated as feminine) here refers to the secular use of fans.

¹³⁷ Martin 2002.

¹³⁸ Leroy 1974, 154.

¹³⁹ Innemée/Van Rompay 1998, 182-183.

reflects common Christian Trinitarian language. While similar terminology is regularly used in doxologies and all kinds of notes in Syriac manuscripts, a close parallel may also be found in the inscription that is incised in the wooden door which closes the altar room. It is dated May 914 AD and attributes the building of the altar to the abbot Moses of Nisibis. The text begins as follows: “To the honor and glory and praise and exaltation of the adorable and holy and consubstantial Trinity ...”¹³⁸

The name of the Monastery

In our inscription, the Monastery is identified as “the Monastery of the House of the Mother of God, Mart(y) Maryam, in the desert of Scetis”. The various components of this name can be found in manuscripts from the middle of the ninth century onwards as well as in inscriptions¹³⁹. One significant element, however, which normally is part of the official name, is missing here: “of the Syrians” (“Monastery of the House of the Mother of God of the Syrians ...”). It is unlikely that lack of space forced the artist to leave out this element, for he could easily have left out “Mart(y) Maryam” instead, an element which is unnecessary and in most cases is not included in the full name. One wonders, therefore, whether the patrons of the flabella deliberately wanted to avoid describing the Monastery as belonging to one specific ethnic and ecclesiastical community.

2. Syriac text in the medallion

The central medallion, in the form of a circle, has a diameter of 12.9 cm. While the Virgin and Child are seated on a throne, flanked in the upper part by two angels, the spaces to the left and right are filled with winding spirals (similar to those which serve as the background to the large Syriac inscription), on which only the attentive eye will find the following Syriac words, written from top to bottom (Pls 6-7):

Left: ܡܪܝܡ ܡܬܪܝܢܐ

Right: ܡܬܪܝܢܐ ܡܪܝܡ

Translation: “Mother of God – Help me in my prayer.”

The two words to the left (*yâldat 'Alâhâ*) represent the Syriac equivalent of the Greek “Theotokos”, as



Pl. 6. Detail text
(Photo: Courtesy
of D. Varli)



Pl. 7. Detail text
(Photo: Courtesy
of D. Varli)

in the name of the Monastery, discussed above. It is not clear whether the *dâlat* of the first word has a dot. In the second word, one would have expected a three-legged Estrangela *hê*. Instead, the artist has incorrectly connected the right and middle leg.

Of the two words to the right, the first should be read as *‘addrin(y)* “help (imperative, *pa.* sg. f.) me”. The ending *yod-nun-yod* is not clear. The *nun* should have been higher than the preceding and the following *yod*. The first letter of the second word at first sight seems to be *qof*. There can be little doubt, however, that the artist intended to write *bet*, but (inadvertently?) connected the upper and lower strokes. The reading must be *ba-ṣlot(y)* “in – or, according to – my prayer”.

Leroy saw the inscription, but did not spell out his reading. He limited himself to providing the translation: “Mère de Dieu, secours de ceux qui t’invocquent”¹⁴⁰. He probably read the first word as a noun (*‘edrà*), whereas the last part of his translation seems to reflect the reading *qârên lwâtek(y)* “calling to you”. This reading seems to me to be impossible.

Paleographically, this inscription closely resembles the other one and it may very well be the work of the same artist, who in this very limited space had to face a far greater challenge. The letter *‘âlaf* has the same characteristics as those described above; as for the *taw*, the two examples have the short element crossing the long element.

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¹⁴⁰ Leroy 1974/75, 35-37.

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The Cult of Saint Sergius in its Socio-Political Context

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In the semi-desert environment of Northwest Syria, ca 40 km southeast of Nicephorion on the Euphrates (present-day Raqqa), in the area that is known as the 'Barbarian Plain', lies the site of Resafa (Pl. 1). This town was located in a region which for centuries functioned as a frontier zone between the Roman and Persian Empires, and in the late Roman period a military fortress was built on the site. Resafa was the centre of the cult of Saint Sergius, a Roman officer who had refused to worship the Roman deities, and as a consequence had been executed here at the end of the third or beginning of the fourth century A.D. With inhabitants of Roman and native origin, either with sedentary or nomadic way of life, and merchants as well as pilgrims visiting the site, Resafa comprised a diversity of socio-political and cultural elements. Its development illustrates on a local level how various contexts co-existed and were of mutual influence. This paper aims at discussing these contexts mentioned above with regard to the development of the cult of Saint Sergius.

Below, an introduction to the site of Resafa and the history of research conducted will be given. Main attention will go to the cult of Saint Sergius, and its position in various cultural contexts. The *Passio*, the story in which the events of the martyrdom of the saint are recorded, as well as the iconography used in depictions of the saint will be looked at. Furthermore, attention will go to one particular building related to the cult of Saint Sergius, located outside the walls of Resafa. Although the discussion still continues, it is clear that this building illustrates at a small level how differing identities contributed to the character of Resafa. Finally, the various contexts of Resafa are regarded. The cult of Saint Sergius will be discussed with regard to the local context, i.e. the nomadic and the sedentary world. A number of observations can be made, that help to a better understanding of the position of Resafa in its regional context, its place in the Byzantine Empire, and in the development of Christianity.

HISTORICAL AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF RESAFA

Early field research in Resafa was undertaken by Musil and Spanner between 1908 and 1918². Today, German scholars continue to excavate at the site³. Research has been proved difficult, because of the intensive rebuilding and adding of buildings to the city from the sixth to thirteenth centuries. These activities have often hardly left a trace of earlier phases of habitation⁴. The walls of Resafa are still reasonably complete, and enclose an area measuring 550 by 400 m. (Pl. 2). Inside the city four churches remain standing, all dating from the sixth century. The largest is the partially restored Saint Sergius Basilica, or Cathedral of the Holy Cross. In the southwestern corner of the city, huge underground cisterns are situated, which could keep a large garrison supplied with water through long sieges. Material finds from the late Roman period are abundant, and consist of pottery, fine ceramic wares (e.g. lamps), glass fragments, amphorae, and coins. The pottery finds consist of coarse as well as fine wares, with sigillata of North-African and Cypriot provenance, indicating that long-distance commodities also found their way to Resafa⁵. Furthermore, a silver treasure, which has been dated on the basis of coins to the thirteenth century, has been found in one of the basilicas.

Traces of early occupation have been discussed by several scholars⁶. Here, the focus will be on the

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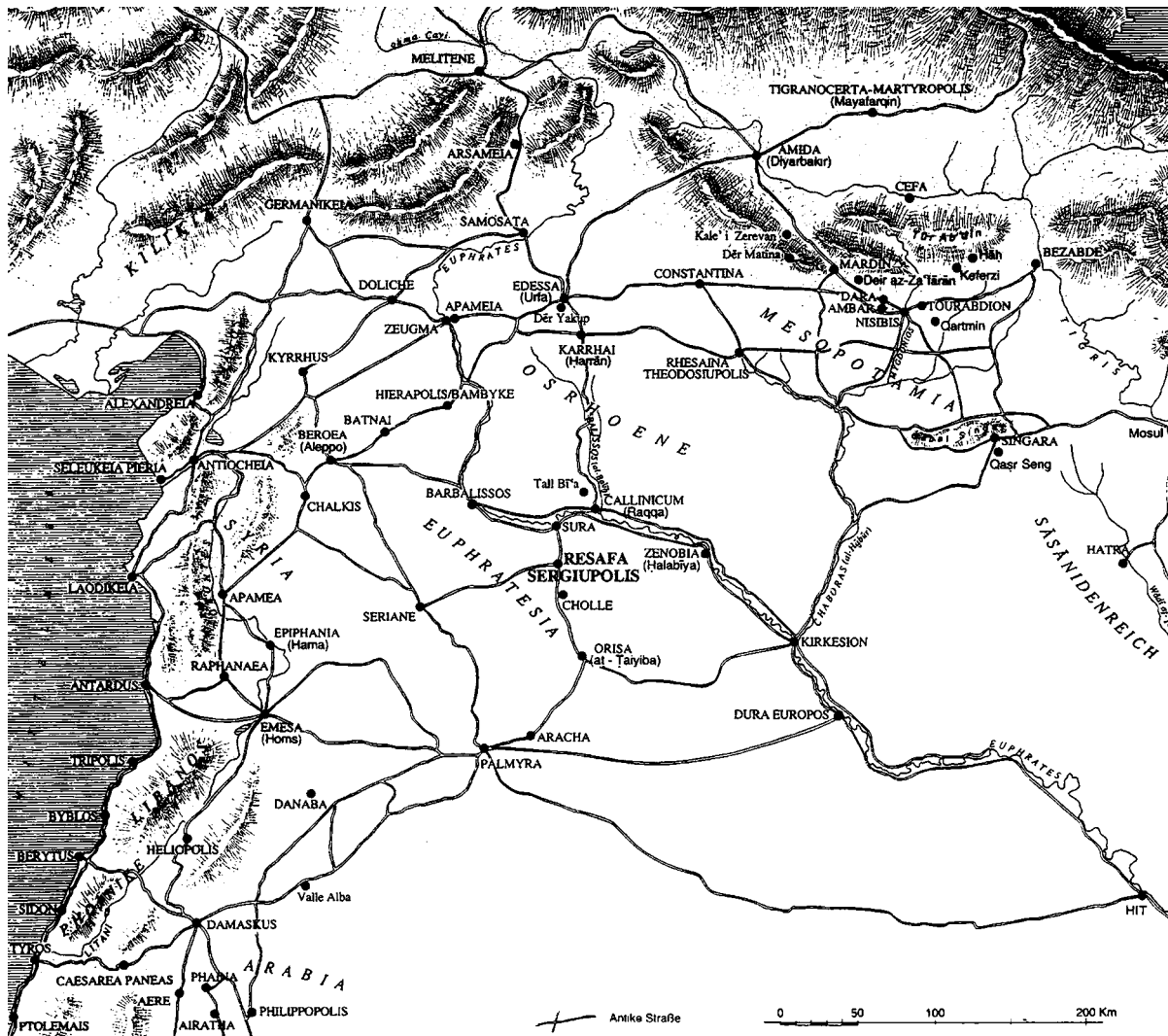
² Musil 1928, 260-272; Guyer/Spanner, 1926.

³ Excavation reports are published in *Damaszener Mitteilungen* as well as in the *Resafa* publications.

⁴ Westphalen 2000, 325-327.

⁵ Ulbert 1990, viii.

⁶ Cf. Konrad 1996, 173-176; Konrad 2001, 117; Musil 1927, 210-211, 260-263.



Pl. 1. Syria and northern Mesopotamia (after Brands 2002, Abb. 1)

late Roman and Byzantine period. At the end of the third century A.D., the *Strata Diocletiana* was created as a fortification line in the East against the Persians. Resafa was one of the fortified settlements, and became positioned in an active frontier region. The town developed and the population as well as the number of visitors (such as merchants) increased. The rise of the Christian cult of Saint Sergius in the fourth century stimulated this development. The installation of the first bishop around 431 gives proof of the increasing importance of the town, and in turn influenced its development; this situation also stimulated commercial life⁷. The cult

obtained followers from all parts of the population – members of the sedentary as well as the (semi-) nomadic inhabitants of the region, merchants and traders, Romans, Arabs and Persians. With the increase in importance of the cult and its spread through Syria, larger political institutions allied themselves to the cult and the relics, and influenced the development of Resafa. Presumably, the town received the status of *metropolis* in 514-518⁸.

The cult provided for an exceptional situation in the region, resulting in a larger development and bloom of the site then otherwise would have been the case. This prosperity was, however, by no means unique in Byzantine Syria. When looked at this larger context, great wealth and prosperity is attested in the late antique period throughout the

⁷ Westphalen 2000, 326.

⁸ Gatier 1998, 238.

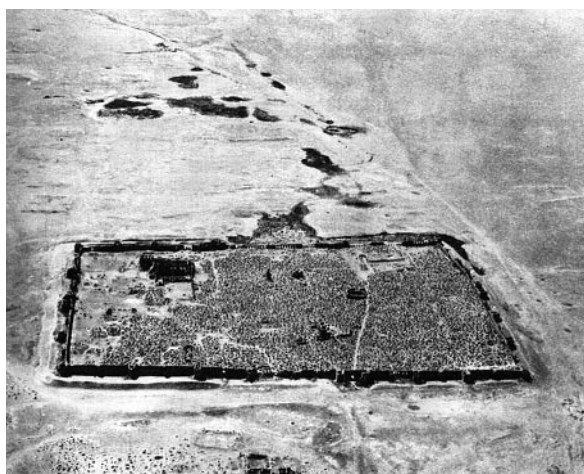


Plate 2. Resafa, aerial view from the North (Poidebard).
(Brands 1998, taf. 60a)

empire. In Syria, Christianity had spread across the province, and monasteries and churches were being built. As Resafa expanded, a larger, Byzantine city was built over the original Roman buildings. As was the case in many towns in the late Roman period, the urban appearance of Resafa transformed into what is often taken as an 'Arabic' type of settlement, with a more random street pattern with smaller streets and alleys, and different types of architecture⁹. In answer to Persian threats in the sixth century, Constantinople adjusted its fortifications on the eastern frontier. The defences of Resafa were expanded as well. The interest Constantinople had in the place is moreover proven by the fact that the emperor Anastasius elevated the ecclesiastical rank of the town to metropolitan status in the 510s, and that he conveyed Sergius' thumb to Constantinople. In the end, however, the real threat came not from Persian assaults but from elsewhere, namely the Muslim Arab invasions which started in the 630s. The city was eventually taken over by the Ummayyad caliph Hisham, who built a palatial summer residence outside the walls on the south of the city. Under Hisham, in the period between 724 and 734 the Great Mosque was built, and the city's image altogether changed. The Abbasids destroyed Hisham's residence some years after his death in 743 and thereafter the city fell into ruins. The population declined, and partly moved to other settlements in the area. Building activities continued to take place until the thirteenth century. Finally, the Mongols completely destroyed the town in 1259 during their move through northern Syria. Since

then, Resafa and its neighbourhood have hardly been occupied¹⁰.

SAINT SERGIUS: THE IDENTITIES OF THE CULT

The story of the martyrdom of Sergius is written down in the *Passio* of SS. Sergius and Bacchus, Sergius' companion¹¹. As part of his trial, Sergius was put on sandals which were spiked inside with long nails, and forced to run nine miles in front of the ducal chariot along the *Strata Diocletiana* from Sura to Tetrapyrgium. The next day he was led to Resafa and was offered a last chance to repent. On his refusal, he was taken outside the walls where, in the presence of many, he was beheaded. According to tradition, a hole in the ground appeared as a divine mark on the spot where he had been killed. A few inhabitants of Resafa buried his body on the site where he had died. A shrine was built over his tomb and the city turned into a pilgrimage centre, while its name changed accordingly to Sergiopolis¹². Later on, Sergius' bones were transferred to a martyrium inside the city walls.

As mentioned above, the town of Resafa was located on a site where various people met. Nomads, traders, as well as pilgrims passed through, and the population consisted, besides local inhabitants, of soldiers and clergymen. In all likelihood, the community of Resafa knew a certain level of socio-political hierarchy. Furthermore, cultural influences of Byzantine and Arab nature were prevalent. The composition of the local society was highly varied and internally complex. These people must have dealt with the martyrdom of Saint Sergius in various ways. As the growth of Resafa had varying effects on them, the question rises among which section of Resafa's community Sergius had the largest part of his worshippers. The *Passio* of SS. Sergius and Bacchus may serve as a source here. Though written about a century after Sergius' mar-

⁹ Cf. e.g. Cameron 1993, 162.

¹⁰ Westphalen 2000, 328, 346.

¹¹ Written down in the fifth century A.D., the account is preserved in the original Greek, ed. Van de Gheyn 1895, 371-395. There exists furthermore a Syriac translation as well as a Latin one, several Arab and a Coptic redaction and a Metaphrastic version which recasts the Greek original in a more literary style. The English translation of the original Greek version is from Boswell 1994. – After Key Fowden 1999, 8.

¹² Ball 2000, 166.

tyrdom, this work gives a direct account of the rise of the cult from the time when it is first attested through the dedication of a church in Resafa for the relics of Sergius short before 431 A.D. Naturally, the *Passio* ought to be reviewed from the perspective of the Christian fifth century. The name of the author has not come down to us, but that is of minor concern here. What matters is the fact that he wrote for a Christian audience in the context of the rising popularity of the cult. The purpose of writing down the *Passio* will not have been to give an accurate account of the previous century's history, but to provide the followers of Sergius with the story of his martyrdom. A great deal of caution should therefore be taken in using the *Passio* as a source of historical information. On the other hand, the *Passio* may reveal details that could not be known otherwise, e.g. from archaeological research, but which could, however, possibly be verified by other sources.

Several aspects of the story told in the *Passio* can be of help in this matter. The first detail of interest here is that it is nowhere mentioned in the *Passio* that Sergius and Bacchus were accompanied by sympathisers on their way. The crowd of people that gathered outside, after Sergius had heard the verdict, will thus likely have been people present in Resafa at that time, i.e. local inhabitants and visitors such as merchants en route. The fact that these people were not only affected by the events, but also took the trouble of burying Sergius' body is striking, as this concerned a so-called enemy of the Roman Empire. It therefore has to be taken into consideration, that this detail of the *Passio* did not so much relate the course of actual events, as that it conveyed a message of propaganda. If people would at all have come out of their houses, they may as well have gone out to laugh and throw stones. The *Passio*, of course, wants to suggest that already here, the people recognised Sergius as a saint. The burial can indeed have been a true act of good faith. For the fourth-century followers, burying the remains may have been a logical act, after a true believer had been martyred. In the Christian context, the consequent cult may be

taken, besides as being the result of the death of Sergius, as inspired by the event following upon his martyrdom, namely the appearance of a gap in the surface where Sergius had been killed. Furthermore, next to strengthening the faith, Sergius' relics had divine healing powers. In a historical context, the fact that the cult was condoned (taken that it was, and that it did not have a hidden existence) may have been the result of a climate of tolerance towards local habits. Even if it took some time before the cult started to develop, this will not have been long before it was generally accepted. The story of the beginning of the cult shows that from the start on, it was connected to the town of Resafa and its inhabitants.

The second aspect to be discussed, is that the popularity of the cult resulted in the desire of fervent Christians from nearby Sura to secure the relics for themselves. According to the *Passio*, the martyr would not permit himself to be removed and alerted the inhabitants of Resafa with a flare. The armed defenders are both said to have defended the relics for their religious importance, and to have acted upon the threat of local disorder and hostilities¹³. If it was not a combination of the two, the former would again indicate that the cult was at least venerated by the sedentary inhabitants of Resafa, although one inclines to argue that nomad worshippers may just not have been near enough to act upon the alarm. The latter will likely have concerned Roman soldiers, and their acting would illustrate the fact that the Romans at least saw the political benefits in protecting the cult. Given the fact that Resafa was a Roman stronghold, the presence of Roman soldiers in the town is not surprising, nor is their wish to prevent hostilities from happening. The third aspect concerns the fact that at some time in history, the relics, which until then had been located at the site outside the walls where Sergius had died, were transferred into the city. Despite this transfer, the original site is said to have remained its sacred character. The reason(s) for this can be interpreted in various ways. Some simply assume that the former site outside the walls provided practical inconvenience¹⁴. The transfer might also be viewed from the frontier context, in which it was perhaps assumed safer to keep the relics within the walls. The saint may have been identified with the city, and seen as its protector and benefactor. In this light it may have been felt necessary for the martyr's bones to be within the city walls.

¹³ Key Fowden 1999, 11; Key Fowden 2000, 311.

¹⁴ Key Fowden 1999, 45.

Furthermore, it can be suggested that it was done on the instigation of local authorities. The reason for doing so might be to place the relics within the world of the city, their own world of local power. Sacred sites and their maintenance and embellishment were directly involved with order among the various communities. Disputed rights of possession would have attracted higher authorities such as bishops and sheikhs, since control of the sacred relics implied more control over its worshippers. If this would have been the case, this might also be indicative that Sergius had followers not only among sedentary people, but also among the nomadic tribes of the region. The authorities, whether primarily Byzantine or local, may have sought means to exert control over these people as well, and using the cult's popularity to do so could have been one way to accomplish that¹⁵.

The fact that the old site still remained in use after the transfer of the relics, and was said to be held sacred, may simply illustrate the holy character that martyr sites generally accumulated in late antiquity. It may also point to different ways of experiencing the cult by different communities, with nomadic followers with their dairy livestock who might not be induced to leave their point of gathering outside the city walls. However, as it is indicated in the *Passio* that the inhabitants of Resafa continued to maintain the site, they likely did not entirely agree with the transfer of the relics to a new building. This may have been for the above-mentioned reason of the ongoing sacred character of the site; it may also have had to do with a disagreement of centralising the power of the saint around a certain person, namely Bishop Alexander of Hierapolis, and his clergy. This bishop was responsible for the construction of the basilica which hereafter would contain the relics. Furthermore, at that time Bishop Alexander was embroiled in a fierce theological debate, which had originated at the Council of Ephesus in 431. This debate concerned the condemnation of Nestorius, who had argued for the two natures of Christ, divine and human, to be completely separated. Alexander was part of a delegation under the leadership of the patriarch of Antioch. Through delay of the journey, the group arrived at the time when the decision to find fault with Nestorius had already been made, under the pressure of Cyril of Alexandria. Though Patriarch John of Antioch and Cyril accepted the Formula of Reunion in 433, some bishops, amongst them

Alexander, remained unrelenting, and eventually John limited their sphere of influence. Alexander had to give up his direct patronage of Resafa and was eventually exiled to the Egyptian mines¹⁶. The fact that the bishop's earlier action had been to build a church within Resafa's walls, and that John of Antioch removed the site from his direct control afterwards, shows that Resafa was of great potential influence and power. The transfer of the relics can thus also be interpreted as Alexander's wish to bind the city and the cult to himself, not just to control the inhabitants but especially in reference to the importance of the place in the larger Christian world.

AN ARAB OR ROMAN-BYZANTINE CULT? THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE SAINT

With the spread of the cult, and still long before the period of Iconoclasm, the demand for images of Saint Sergius increased¹⁷. Representations of the saint, with or without Saint Bacchus, are known from various places and contexts¹⁸. Two types of representation seem to have circulated. The first one concerns a soldier-saint, the second one an equestrian saint, but also wearing military dress. A characteristic feature, mostly known from the former type, is that the saints wear some sort of medallion or gem around the neck. In the *Passio*, it is stated that Sergius and Bacchus were stripped of their clothes, belts and golden collars (*maniakia*), and were dressed up in women's clothes. In their representations, this humiliation is undone, and the *manakia* are taken as a way to identify the saints in portraits, though they were later denominated by inscriptions as well. As the iconography here seems to be a very accurate reflection of the *Passio*, it could be argued that this story was taken as a source of information and inspiration for the representation of the saints. Although Sergius and Bacchus were Roman soldiers, the fact that the costume worn by

¹⁵ The reader should be cautious not to accept this argument too eagerly. Although the suggestion is in itself an interesting thought, it is only made in the context of another suggestion, namely that the leaders of Resafa used the cult to obtain control over the (nomadic and sedentary) community.

¹⁶ Key Fowden 1999, 26-27.

¹⁷ Key Fowden 1999, 31-44.

¹⁸ Walter 2003, 152-162.



Pl. 3. Depictions of Saint Sergius; a = bronze attachment; b = bronze bracelet; c = lead seal; d = silver bracelet (Key Fowden 1999, 37)

the saints is indeed often military may reflect a Byzantine cultural influence. For the people of Resafa, this may have been a logical choice; arguably, a representation in traditional costume was just as logical, though this cannot be so easily said when nomadic followers of Sergius are regarded¹⁹. The *Passio* is a Christian story, and in that light has, to a certain extent, a propagandistic content. The story of Sergius, a concerted Roman high officer, can be seen as an illustration of the impact of Christianity in society. However, the fact remains that aspects of the story can be regarded as at least a partial reflection of society. It can then be taken as an indication that it was the sedentary population of Resafa, perhaps only the authorities, who largely determined the character of the cult. The character of the inhabitants and/or their authorities in this light appears to have been romanised to a certain extent.

The first representations of Sergius at Resafa seem to have shown the saints on horseback (Pl. 3)²⁰. Again the *Passio* provides a direct link between story and iconography, as Sergius and

Bacchus were said to have belonged to the *schola gentilium*, a horse guard. This fact is, however, not mentioned any further, and the option is suggested that the image was derived from the existing iconography of gods in the desert of Syria²¹. These Arab rider gods, often depicted on either camel- or horseback, were in particular associated with the nomad population and their way of life, and acted as protectors of the caravans²². Several such pairs are known, from Palmyra, the Hauran (where dedications to Sergius appeared early in time²³) and the south of Syria²⁴. Representations are either in traditional garb or Roman outfits, and are all military in character. They are sometimes accompanied by inscriptions, either in local or Greek language. Furthermore, the rider gods are associated with medicinal arts and are often ascribed healing powers²⁵. Next to the military character and the riding-aspect, this feature is connected to Sergius as well, as his relics are said to have possessed healing powers. If the warrior saint can be linked to a Byzantine milieu, and an equestrian saint may have had its roots in local tradition, the iconography testifies to the assimilation of cultures, as Arab sedentaries and pastoralists worshipped a Christian deity dressed up in Roman clothing.

In the case of the representations of Sergius and Bacchus, a direct link can be made to the tradition of the *Passio*, as details related there are reflected in the iconography. The type of representation as a soldier can perhaps have appeared only after earlier depictions of Sergius as a rider-saint, which can be connected to traditional depictions of rider protectors. However, as these Arab rider-gods are represented both in a traditional as well as a Roman style, it must be observed that syncretism had been taking place already. In the Arab tradition, Sergius and Bacchus may have been taken as a Christianised version of the well-known gods, but to what extent and in what way the different forms of iconography worked in the experience of their followers, regarding the identification of the saints, is difficult to perceive.

THE AL-MUNDIR BUILDING

On the cemetery at the north side of Resafa a building is situated near the main road which lead from the Euphrates and Sura to Resafa. The building, built of stone and still standing today, measures about 20 m. in length and 17 m. in width. It

¹⁹ Note that these nomadic followers remain obscure. Their presence is suggested, but still not undeniable attested.

²⁰ Key Fowden 1999, 38-40.

²¹ Key Fowden 1999, 40.

²² For a different approach, see the article of Mat Immerzeel in this volume.

²³ Key Fowden 1999, 41.

²⁴ Weber 1995, 210.

²⁵ Weber 1995, 210-211; Key Fowden 1999, 42-43.



Pl. 4. Resafa, al-Mundir building: apse with inscription
(Key Fowden 1999, 162)

has a cross-in-square layout with the main entrance located on the west side (thus directed to the main road), and an apse flanked by two rectangular side rooms on the east side of the building (Pl. 4). Inside the building are four centrally placed columns, with capitals decorated with a split leaf design. The floor of the apse is situated circa 0.90 m. above the floor level of the central space, and was likely reached by stairs²⁶. The central space was probably covered by a pyramidal wooden roof (Musil also mentioned painting on this roof)²⁷, while barrel vaults covered the main axes. Domes still cover the small bays in the building's four corners. Some decorations remain visible, though often damaged and sometimes out of sight. Among them, various crosses can be distinguished, as well as a bird which has been identified as an eagle. Set in the back of the apse, the upper band of the framework is decorated with a carved frieze, which depicts a marine motif. This contains seals, sea lions, a couple of dolphins, and two creatures of which only the upper half looks human, one of which appears to hold a rudder. The lower band bears a Greek inscription of approximately 1.20 m. long, reading: Νικαίη ἡ τυχη Ἀλαμουνδάρου ('long live al-Mundhir'; Pl. 5). The inscription refers to the Ghassanid leader



Pl. 5. Resafa, al-Mundir building: inscription mentioning al-Mundir (Brands 1998, Taf. 64c)

al-Mundhir, called Alamoundaros in Greek, who headed a confederation of Constantinople's Arab allies from 569 to 581/2²⁸. Although it cannot be ruled out that the building was constructed earlier, and al-Mundhir only occupied it, this inscription is generally used for obtaining a date of construction for the building. The Ghassan were originally a nomadic tribe from further south in Arabia. They started moving northwards in a series of tribal migrations at the end of the first century A.D. Towns like Bosra and Amman, as well as Resafa, are considered important Ghassanid centres. As clients of Rome defending the border as well as in their role of Christian patrons of Sergius, the Ghassanids contributed to the embellishment and development of Resafa/Sergiopolis, which for them served both as a religious centre and a frontier fortification²⁹. The cult of Saint Sergius was spread by the Ghassan amongst the Arabs, and the massive wealth generated by the pilgrimage traffic to Resafa, which was used to embellish the city, reached its height under them³⁰.

The location of the building on the cemetery may have been connected to the history of Saint Sergius, as related in the *Passio* of SS. Sergius and Bacchus. Although it is nowhere explicitly stated in the text that Sergius was killed at the north side of Resafa, it has always been more or less assumed that this was the case. North was the direction from

²⁶ Spanner/Guyer 1926, 43.

²⁷ Musil 1928, 165.

²⁸ Brands 1998, 212-214; Key Fowden 2000, 303-304, 310.

²⁹ Ball 2000, 101, 103.

³⁰ Ball 2000, 103 n. 312.

whence Sergius came, and where the necropolis of Resafa was located. Apart from the Christian graves present, a late Roman mausoleum located north of the al-Mundhir building has led to a date of use of the site in antique times. Although none of the graves has been systematically excavated, many of the coins found by Bedouins digging in this grave area are said to be late antique³¹. The *Passio* can even be called upon here, where it is told that Sergius was taken outside the walls to be killed. According to antique tradition, the cemetery, apparently in use at that time, was located outside the town. Where else to take someone sentenced to death, someone who, from a Roman point of view, had been in the wrong? Hence, this site may well have been the place that in late antique times was connected to the martyrdom of Sergius. As venerator of Saint Sergius and patron of the town of Resafa, al-Mundhir may have chosen this location to build an edifice to emphasise his personal relation to the saint. It is even suggested that al-Mundhir intended himself to be buried on this site as well³².

The function of this building has previously been interpreted as a church as well as an audience hall of the Ghassanids³³. Recent interpretations of the al-Mundhir building plead in favour of a church³⁴. In order to reach these conclusions, earlier typological studies of the architecture and layout of the building have been re-examined³⁵. Furthermore, scholars have pointed out that in the classical as well as Arab context, an audience hall (a favoured interpretation in earlier studies) was usually located within the walls of a city, and was also often part of a larger building complex. This can even be illustrated with an example from al-Mundhir himself, who, after having triumphed over the Lakhmids in

575, established an audience hall located in the middle of the town of Hira³⁶. It has additionally been argued that the building could have marked the starting point for a procession leading to the basilica which contained the relics of Sergius³⁷. In Arab society, churches could furthermore function as a meeting point between nomad and sedentary-living members of a clan (like the Ghassanids) as well³⁸.

In antique times, local rulers were often represented in sacred buildings through inscriptions. The formula of the inscription mentioning al-Mundhir is considered to contain standard expressions which were widely used throughout the Byzantine Empire between the late fifth and seventh centuries. In the vicinity of Resafa, inscriptions with comparable formulae have been found. Although these inscriptions are clearly of a religious nature, caution is in order in distinguishing between religious and secular expressions, though of the same formula. The question remains then, whether the al-Mundhir inscription was meant in a more profane or sacred way. It could simply be copied from the sacred context, expressing a connection between the local saint and the patron of the city. It can also be seen in a political way, as an expression of a private local ruler. From this point of view, al-Mundhir's visit to the emperor Tiberius in Constantinople in 580 may provide an extra explanation. During his visit, al-Mundhir received a special imperial decoration which distinguished him from other Arab client kings. This inscription, having adopted the cultural language of Rome, may have been a personal acclamation to (again) place himself in the imperial honour³⁹.

Though a building date for the site has not yet been established, the assumption is always made that al-Mundhir constructed the building, and that the inscription and decorations are contemporary to the building itself. These are thus seen in the same context. The fact that some of the decorations are located out of sight is taken as a possibility that al-Mundhir had all the decorations depicted simply to express his own religious sentiments. It should be noted, however, that the inscription of al-Mundhir and the marine motif are both located in the apse. Whatever the exact function of the building, the apse will have been of special importance. For the inscription, a secular as well as a sacred interpretation is possible. As mentioned above, the formula used in the inscription could be used either way⁴⁰.

³¹ Key Fowden 2000, 311.

³² Brands 1998, 232.

³³ Cf. Sauvaget 1939.

³⁴ Cf. Brands 1998; Key Fowden 2000.

³⁵ It should be noted, however, that ailed buildings were taken over by the Christians from the original Roman basilica, which functioned as an audience hall. Within Near Eastern tradition, the basilica as audience hall was already known, and used as a power place. Thus, drawing a very wide distinction between buildings which were in use as a church or an audience hall, may be erroneous.

³⁶ Brands 1998, 218-220.

³⁷ Brands 1998, 233.

³⁸ Brands 1998, 314-315.

³⁹ Brands 1998, 222-223.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*; Key Fowden 2000, 309-310.

Al-Mundhir could have meant to proclaim his success. However, the rather inconspicuous location of the inscription in the innermost recess of the apse, and letters standing only 0.12 m. high and with no signs of colour, are doubtful factors. If meant to proclaim success, this would perhaps not be the first choice to locate and display an inscription. Furthermore, if al-Mundhir would have wished to make a statement like this, he would have used the Arab language instead of Greek. On the other hand, it can be argued that the use of Greek expressed al-Mundhir being connected to local authority, while he was even granted special privileges among the Arab allies. In a sacred context, al-Mundhir may have wished to emphasize his connection to the local Saint Sergius by relating his name to the building. In that case the acclamation would be one of a venerator of a local saint. The choice for the location in the apse certainly makes sense in this way: the apse was the most sacred part of a church. An eastward orientation has in any way always been a feature in ecclesiastical architecture. The cross preceding the inscription might have been connected directly with the inscription. Perhaps al-Mundhir wanted to connect his name with the cross, thus simultaneously expressing his participation in religion and his wish to put his name under the protection of the cross. That this was a common habit is shown from the many inscriptions placed on sacred as well as secular buildings, among them many private buildings, where through formulae and/or Christian iconography the inhabitants placed themselves in a religious tradition, at the same time wishing for protection from that religion.

AN ADDITIONAL INTERPRETATION OF THE FUNCTION OF THE AL-MUNDHIR BUILDING

Whereas the origins of the construction of the building remain obscure, the edifice will have had some sort of communal function. Regardless of the question whether this building was connected to the first shrine of Sergius, the relics of the saint had long been taken within the city walls by the time the al-Mundhir inscription was applied, assuming that the inscription dates from, or perhaps even after, his reign⁴¹. The individuals associated with the building are at any rate the Ghassanid phylarch al-Mundhir, and possibly Saint Sergius. A number of edifices have been connected to the Ghassanids, many of which are related to Sergius as well. Within

this context, the building could easily be interpreted as being constructed on a site which was related to Sergius, moreover to the very place of his martyrdom.

Another context of the site may offer an additional interpretation. This is, again, the context of the nomadic world, but this time not as related to the sedentary community, but with respect to its own distinctive way of life. As stated above, an important aspect of this life was migration, whether between summer and winter pastures or in pursuit of animals which could be hunted. One of these animals was the gazelle. Resafa was located in the vicinity of one of the main migration routes for gazelles. Ancient as well as ethnographic descriptions mention the gazelle being hunted in various ways. Archaeologically, this has e.g. been attested through kites⁴². Next to several sites where the animals could best be hunted, a widespread tradition of holy places existed, in which it was forbidden to kill animals⁴³. These sanctuaries, called *haram*, were often situated on a strategic place, sometimes acting as a central- or marketplace, near a source of water or at the convergence of several *wadis*. They could be regarded as sacred by association of a holy tree, or moreover be connected to a tomb of a holy man⁴⁴. It has been suggested that the original tomb of Sergius, outside the walls, may have acted as such a *haram*⁴⁵. The reason for coming to such an understanding is a passage in the closing lines of the *Passio* of SS. Sergius and Bacchus, which tells of wild animals gathering at Sergius' tomb every year on his festival on October 7. At this time, the first rains were expected to fall in the region, which also marked the moment of departure to the south for pastoralists as well as gazelles. Next to this citation, the natural location of Resafa near the migration routes as well as on the convergence of wadis could argue for the shrine of Sergius to have contained such an additional meaning and function.

The question remains if the al-Mundhir building had this function. It has already been noted that the purpose it would have had for the Ghassanid

⁴¹ Al-Mundhir reigned between 569 and 581-2 A.D., whereas the earliest basilica that is said to have contained the relics, basilica A, was constructed in the fifth century.

⁴² Cf. Fowden 1999.

⁴³ Fowden 1999, 123.

⁴⁴ Fowden 1999, 124; Key Fowden, 1999, 99.

⁴⁵ Fowden 1999, 126; Key Fowden 1999, 99.

confederation could be different from that of a church, the function the building was first ascribed to have had. A *haram*, however, not only functioned as a sacred site against slaughter, but also with respect to several other aspects of traditional society. Just as was often the case with religious edifices, other actions such as business deals, social agreements, judgements, etc. were performed here, all under the protection of the saint⁴⁶. In other words, religious as well as secular actions, performed by members of the community, or in some cases authorities, could take place at a holy site such as a *haram*. The secular and sacred worlds were thus closely linked. When again regarding the function of audience room as apparently employed by the Ghassanid phylarch al-Mundhir, the site of a *haram* seems to provide a possible context for interpretation. Despite their service to Constantinople, the Ghassanids were a tribal organisation with an origin in and a lifestyle which partly still practised nomadism. Though not positively affirmed, the above context can furthermore add to the interpretation of the site as the location of the tomb of Saint Sergius. Clearly embedded in local Arab nomadic traditions, Sergius as well as his site may through this function have become part of the daily life of the population of Resafa.

Next to the possible reasons mentioned above, it may have been for this integration into daily life of Resafa's community as well that the saint's relics were transferred to a location within the walls. Supposedly, the authorities wished to gain more control over the arrangements made within the vicinity of the relics, perhaps because members of the sedentary community rather than the nomads worshipped the saint and applied the functional aspects of the relics in their daily lives, while the tradition and functions of a *haram*, as initially being integrated into nomadic existence, slowly moved to the background, since the emphasis shifted more towards the incorporation of the saint and his protection in daily sedentary life. The transfer of the relics could have originated in the wish to honour

the saint with a larger and more embellished edifice, and to share the wealth acquired through pilgrimage with the revered saint who had caused it, and who had looked after so many. This may have been out of convenience, for reasons of safety, or another, unknown reason. Whatever has been the case, the relics were transferred into the city, while the original site retained its character of sanctity. As the relics were under the protection of the Byzantine Orthodox Church, the Ghassanid federation under their leader al-Mundhir may have applied the inscription by means of a reaffirmation of its affinities with Sergius, just as it had done with other buildings connected to the saint, as well as a reaffirmation of the nomadic traditions in which the federation was rooted.

THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPES OF THE CULT

Perception of the landscape changes through time, and individuals as well as communities are involved with it. Through time, these perceptions accumulate and are thus mutually influential. Apart from constituting one another, they can exist separately at the same time. The position Resafa took in its environment as experienced by the sedentary population can be described with reference to its character of safety and life in the midst of a plain which was known as 'barbarian', i.e. unsafe and barren. To the population as well as travelling merchants, pilgrims, etc. who were on their way to Resafa, the town will indeed have been a safe spot on the map, where wild animals and raiders posed a threat⁴⁷. This surrounding world was, however, the home of nomadic tribes, such as the Ghassanids. The continuity of their lifestyle, at a time that sedentary life expanded under Byzantine rule, may be taken as a marker of the manifold character of life in the semi-desert. Living and moving in the wide steppe was about following tracks and processing the knowledge about the greater patterns as well as the local details. Within this nomadic lifestyle, points of convergence occupied a special position, and especially points around water sources were of importance⁴⁸. The place Resafa took in the world of the local pastoralists differed in character from that of the sedentary community. As the town increased in size and importance in the Byzantine period, it may generally have been considered a central place.

Concerning the history of the town, it can be observed that the site started to develop as a

⁴⁶ Fowden 1999, 99.

⁴⁷ Cf. Key Fowden 1999, 101, who mentions lions as a continuing threat to inhabitants of and travellers in the middle Euphrates region until the nineteenth century, and the function of monasteries and saints' relics as protection and shelter from this and other threats.

⁴⁸ Key Fowden 1999, 3.

gathering and watering place for peoples on the move. Apart from a central place, Resafa may more have been regarded with respect to the routes, i.e. not as a centre with a surrounding territory, but as a station along the road. Through time, the Roman *Strata Diocletiana* may have acted in this respect as well, as it transported not only soldiers, materials and news, but also merchants and pilgrims. Through time, a shift of emphasis may have occurred from mobility and the importance of local knowledge of the region and its routes, to a larger importance of towns as stopping places. As migrating nomads, soldiers, merchants and pilgrims increasingly used the roads, these perceptions may also have existed next to each other. It should be noted, however, that this increased use was the result of the growing importance of the town. It can therefore also be seen as an accumulation of perceptions, with an increasing amount of identities being involved, all sharing the same context in a different way. Within this landscape, the political frontier between the Byzantine and Persian empires acted as an artificial divide⁴⁹. In order to maintain their territorial claims, both empires turned to military alliances with the nomadic Arab inhabitants of the region, and to the construction of fortifications. The demarcation between town and surrounding landscape can be marked specifically. In the case of Resafa, the walls clearly indicate that the milieu in which the town on a larger scale existed was experienced as hostile.

THE URBAN CONTEXT OF THE CULT

The assimilation of cultures in the iconography of the saint illustrates various elements that comprised the identities of the inhabitants of Resafa and the worshippers of Saint Sergius. This can also be said with regard to the buildings that successively contained his relics. The fact that the supposed first building in this succession, that of al-Mundhir, has often been interpreted as an audience hall, has everything to do with the semi-nomadic traditions of the Ghassanids. It appears that, through time, the cult became entwined with local and regional politics. Though the early iconography of Sergius seems to point to nomad followers, the larger part of the Christian community seems to have comprised the sedentary inhabitants of Resafa. As the town grew in importance and developed into a regional centre, higher authorities concerned

themselves with the town as well as with the cult, influencing its development and character.

The potential function of the al-Mundhir building as the original place where the cult of Sergius flourished can again be looked at. The fact that it was built on that specific location may already indicate that either the site or the specific function of the building had a particular meaning. The location could have been regarded as the possible place of the martyrdom of Sergius, while the function may have been that of a political statement, as the building was located outside the city walls, an area controlled by secular and ecclesiastical authorities. It is possible that the building functioned as a focal point, but the special character of the site can have been manifold. For both nomads and e.g. visiting pilgrims, the building may have served as a central point located along a major route.

The fact that the site remained in use even after the transfer of the relics gives proof of a continuity of meaning ascribed to the site that must have been distinctive, for whatever reason. Moreover, if the building was already in use before the inscription was placed (a possibility not ruled out by research), its connotation may have been affirmed and re-emphasised through this act, but it can also have added another layer to the building's significance. In archaeological research, diverging interpretations that possibly accumulated are often regarded separately from each other, instead of being recognised as supplementary to the constitution of succeeding layers of perception and experience. Moreover, sacral and secular life often used to be distinguished quite clearly from one another. Present research, however, has developed towards a more integrating methodology on regarding ancient society. This has also been the case with the research on the al-Mundhir building, where the possibility of a secular alongside a sacral function of the building is being explored. There are factors of the connection the building could have encompassed between daily and ceremonial life, the possible use of the building as a (sacral) focal point as well as the site where ceremony took place, its location on and direction to the road, and the use of the site by people of various and multilateral identities. These aspects of purpose and perception can have accumulated and in this way constituted one another, but could also

⁴⁹ Key Fowden 1999, 3.

have existed simultaneously, adding to the complex meaning and place the building may have taken in its environment.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have tried to combine a number of levels in order to view material data from various perspectives. The archaeological information available from the site of Resafa is being reviewed on a local, regional and theoretical level. It also concerns the development of a Christian cult within the various contexts of the site of origin, and is meant to lead to some interpretations of the cultural landscapes of Resafa.

The level of interaction between Romans and the local population is difficult to determine. It is, for example, not known whether and how the Romans participated in the development of the town, and whether they connected themselves to Sergius and if so to what extent. Regarding the authorities at a higher level, the central government is known to have involved itself with local affairs. Striking is the fact that high-ranked ecclesiastical as well as secular authorities to the highest level apparently took a personal interest in the development of the city. The reason for this was the cult of Saint Sergius existing there, which might be seen as a local element transcending the region and being spread throughout the empire where it exerted influence on the higher authorities. The function and position of the al-Mundhir building can be a testimony of this, as it can be placed in the context of the town of Resafa, the development of the cult of Saint Sergius and the Ghassanid federation.

The Resafan community at large can best be described as 'Byzantine Arab'. The development of the material culture of Resafa should be regarded in the light of the local as well as larger processes of cultural interaction. The town of Resafa can be seen as an entity with its own internal dynamics. There were different groups of people that inhabited the region, all with their own contexts and interests. Next to that, the town and its surrounding region were part of larger environments of cultural, socio-political and religious nature. Whether the development and growth of this town, and the character of life were mainly determined by local circumstances or larger processes, remains open to debate.

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